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TWO LONDON FAIRIES

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TWO
LONDON FAIRIES

BY

GEO. R. SIMS

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1906

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Two London Fairies

CHAPTER I

HOW TWO FAIRIES TOOK A FLAT

NOBODY in Fairyland quite knew how old Grandmamma Silverlocks was. But she must have been very old indeed, because she had once been a witch who went into the best mortal society, and changed pretty princesses into white does and handsome young princes into monsters. Fairies, of course, never grow old, but witches are born old.

Grandmamma Silverlocks left off being wicked a long time ago. When the fairies assembled in congress and decided that they would never again take part in the everyday affairs of human beings, that spells and enchantments should cease to be fairy practices, and that any inhabitant leaving Fairyland on any excuse whatever should

never be permitted to return to it, Grandmamma Silverlocks made a virtue of necessity and became good.

She was not a fairy herself. She had lived in Mortal Land in a cottage made of hardbake and barley sugar, with a gingerbread roof, to which she used to lure little boys and girls against whose parents she had a spite. But the fairies interfered with her business dreadfully, always rescuing the children after they had eaten a considerable portion of the cottage.

So one day, tired of being "constantly eaten out of house and home"—that was the way she put it—the worried witch made a compact with the fairies. If they would let her live with them she would retire from business and abide by the laws of Fairyland.

That is how Grandmamma Silverlocks came to live among the fairies. There were difficulties at first. The old witch grumbled at having to drink dew out of a roseleaf. She had rheumatism and hobbled about with the aid of a stick, as all witches

do, and the fairy dew was not the dew she had been accustomed to. The dew of the valley might suit fairies, but witches prefer Mountain Dew.

However, as she found her health improved rapidly on the fairy diet, Grandmamma Silverlocks gradually left off grumbling and became quite a popular character. She had had vast experience of the world as a witch, and when she was in a garrulous mood the fairies would crowd round her and listen to her gossip about Royal Families and the aristocracy.

And these anecdotes were quite up-to-date, for in some mysterious way the old witch managed to know all that was going on in the mortal world. There were rumours that a Society paper was brought to her every week by a former familiar, and as that would have been a breach of her contract strict watch was kept for a time upon the Dell of Ferns in which she lived. But no stranger visited her, and so the means by which the retired witch received news of mortal doings remained a mystery.

Grandmamma Silverlocks's favourites were two sisters, Fairy Sunbeam and Fairy Daydream. To please the old lady they had allowed her to give them mortal names, and address them as Mabel and Jenny.

Returning late one moonlight night from the annual ball which had been given by the Queen of the Fairies in her Rainbow Palace, Sunbeam and Daydream took a short cut to their home, which was in Blush Rose Avenue. They passed through Fern Dell.

They were tripping lightly along, when suddenly Daydream clutched her sister tightly by the arm.

"Hush!" exclaimed Daydream under her breath, "and look yonder." She pointed with her wand, and the astonished Sunbeam beheld Granny Silverlocks in earnest conversation with a little, misshapen gnome named Blinkawink.

He was one of the gnomes who inhabited a gold-mine from which the fairies had obtained the wealth they bestowed upon favoured mortals in the days when they used to go about among them.

Since the fairies had abandoned the mortal department of their business they had no need of gold, because they got everything they wanted for nothing. But the gnomes lived in the mines still, keeping themselves to themselves and rarely coming to the surface. Blinkawink, the gnome who was talking to Granny Silverlocks, was an exception. He was constantly quarrelling with his comrades, and had frequently been punished by being sent up and compelled to stop in the sunshine for several hours at a time. The sunshine was his pet aversion. It used to make him wink and blink, and feel very hot and uncomfortable. That is how he got his name.

"Why is that wicked little imp here with Granny?" whispered Daydream.

"They are talking—let us make ourselves invisible and listen."

"I sha'n't be able to come so often—certainly not every week," Blinkawink was saying. "The King's getting suspicious. If he knew I was betraying the secrets that

pass through our place he'd gold brick me up for a couple of centuries."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Granny; "if you don't come, whatever shall I do for the news? I sha'n't know what is going on in the world, and I shall mope to death."

"I've been thinking how to get over the difficulty," said the gnome. "I have been tapping the cable messages, but the messages that now pass over Fairyland are the Marconi. Gnomes are the most practical electricians in the world, and I think I shall be able to fix you up a little arrangement that will enable you to receive the messages yourself as they pass—you'll tap them above-ground as I have been doing below."

"Then I shall get all the news of the world?"

"Well, you'll get all the news from London, and that's where the news of the world goes to before it is sent away, I fancy. Don't worry; I'll fix the arrangement up for you the first dark night."

"I don't think I could live here if I didn't know what was going on," said Granny.

"Mortals, you know, are so much more interesting to an old witch than fairies. But I am afraid I am giving you a lot of trouble."

"Not at all—not at all," said the gnome, politely. "I like you because you once were wicked. All the people here are good and that annoys me because I'm wicked myself."

"But I am good now."

"Yes, I know—but you weren't always. I like you not for what you are, but for what you were. Now, good-night—I must get back into the mine—this bright moonlight hurts my eyes."

The gnome nodded to the old witch and disappeared quickly among the ferns. Directly he was out of hearing the two fairies made themselves visible.

"Oh, you wicked old woman!" they exclaimed together. "You have been conspiring with a gnome of bad character."

Granny Silverlocks gave a little scream and fell on her knees.

"Don't betray me," she said. "If the

Queen knew my secret there would be no more news from earth. Oh, if you knew what I've heard to-night! The news from London my friend brought me is most interesting. My dears, you never heard such shocking things as are happening. Come into my grotto and sit down, and I'll tell you stories that will make your wings stand on end."

Sunbeam and Daydream hesitated. But they were very much interested in Mortal Land, which they knew had changed a great deal since the days when every village and every Royal Palace was familiar ground to travelling fairies. So they consented to stop and have half an hour's chat with the old witch before they went home to bed.

. . . . . .

Half an hour later the two fairies came out of the witch's grotto. Their faces were very pale and their eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, Sunbeam!" exclaimed Daydream, "these things would never have happened if the fairies had kept their old control over human destinies."

"No, Daydream, dear. Why, you or I could have brought happiness to those miserable people Granny has told us about, just by a wave of our wand."

"Of course we could—and we could have made those wicked people powerless for evil by putting a spell upon them. It seems to me there is a fine field for us in the world still."

"Yes, especially in the big cities. They seem to be the places that offer the largest opportunities of usefulness to an energetic and practical fairy."

Daydream and Sunbeam remained absorbed in thought until they reached their residence, a beautiful bower of roses, standing by itself at the end of Blush Rose Avenue.

When they reached home they did not lie down upon their couch of rose-leaves, but sat talking long and earnestly.

"Let us do it!" exclaimed Daydream, suddenly. "After all, to punish the wicked and reward the good is a glorious mission."

"Yes, dear; but our people decided long ago to give up that sort of thing entirely.

It must be centuries since a fairy interfered in mortal affairs."

"Yes; of course, there is that to be thought of. And the present race of mortals are quite unused to fairies. We should attract a great deal of attention, I expect, and I'm not quite sure that our costumes would be suitable to the great cities Granny told us about."

"But we are fairies. We can dress as we like, can't we?"

"Of course But we don't know how mortals do dress."

"We could transport ourselves to London in a moment. We are fairies, remember, and distance does not exist for us. We could arrive invisible, see what the folks are like, and wish ourselves into the latest fashion."

"Ah, but you forget, dear! There is the law of Fairyland, passed at the last congress. Any fairy quitting our Queen's dominions can never return. Fancy being compelled to live for ever in a crowded and gloomy city."

Daydream rose and put her arms about Sunbeam's neck.

"Sunbeam," she said softly, "here we are leading useless, selfish lives. We have fairy gifts, and we are letting them lie idle. Could you not, dear sister, endure even banishment from Fairyland if you could lead a noble, useful life and bring happiness again to those poor neglected mortals?"

"Yes," replied Sunbeam, in a trembling voice. "I think to do that I would risk everything!"

"Then let us start."

"When?"

"At once, dear sister."

"What shall we do? Shall we alight in a cottage or a palace—or in a dell?"

"We will just go to London, and directly we arrive we will transform ourselves into two ordinary young women. No one need suspect that we are fairies, as we can conduct ourselves just like ordinary mortals. With our fairy gifts we shall be able to see at once exactly what we ought to do."

A few minutes later some fairies who were

sleeping lightly opened their eyes and listened intently to a strange sound.

When they compared notes in the morning some of them said that the sound that reached them was like a deep sob.

One fairy declared that she had been lying awake at the time, and that she had actually heard a wailing voice in the air exclaim, "Good-bye for ever to Fairyland."

The next day Sunbeam and Daydream were missing. They were searched for everywhere, but in vain.

The Queen ordered search parties to go about in every direction all day, and at night the fire-flies and glow-worms were called out to light up Fairyland in order that the search might be continued.

But all was in vain. The mysterious disappearance of Sunbeam and Daydream was the sole topic of conversation in Fairyland for many months.

No one had the slightest idea what had become of them.

Except Granny Silverlocks.

Granny had noticed how deeply the two fairies were moved by her budget of news from Mortal Land, and, being a witch, she divined what had happened.

If she had only been quite sure in what direction her fairy friends had flown she would have gone after them.

She still possessed the power of summoning a familiar and ordering a broomstick to be got ready for a long journey.

But with her knowledge of the condition of things in Mortal Land in the twentieth century she did not care to risk arriving in London mounted on a broomstick until she was quite sure that the two fairies would be there to protect her. The powers of a witch are limited, but fairies can do exactly what they choose and run no risks.

Witches run a good many.

. . . . . .

The estate agent looked keenly at the two young ladies who sat in his office.

"You wish to take the vacant flat in Mazenod Mansions, Bloomsbury. Have you looked over it?"

"Yes; my sister and I went over it this morning—we think it will suit."

"You know the rent?"

"The porter told us £150 a year. We wish to enter into possession at once."

"Very good, Miss—er—"

"That is our card. We are sisters."

"Miss Mabel and Miss Jenny Smith," said the agent as he looked at the card. "And about references?"

"References?"

"Yes—we have to be very particular in letting flats."

"Oh, we quite understand that. But we only arrived in London this morning, and we have no friends or acquaintances here."

"Then your solicitor—or your bankers."

"We should be quite willing to pay a year's rent in advance, shouldn't we, Jenny?" said one of the young ladies, turning to the other.

"Yes, dear."

Miss Jenny Smith felt in her pocket and laid a purse on the table.

Then she passed her dainty little umbrella twice over it, and said to the agent, "If you will kindly open that purse you will find the first year's rent in it in bank-notes."

The agent stared. He had noticed that the umbrella had been waved like a fairy's wand or a magician's baton. He began to wonder if he was assisting at a conjuring entertainment.

But he opened the purse and there were the bank-notes. "May—I—er—ask you," he stammered, "why you did that extraordinary business with your umbrella?"

"Oh! it's a habit my sister has. She is passionately fond of pantomimes," exclaimed Miss Mabel, hastily.

"I see. Well, of course, if you pay a year's rent in advance—but I really ought to have a reference."

Jenny looked the estate agent straight in the face. Her eyes were fixed on his eyes. He tried to look away but couldn't. He began to feel most uncomfortable.

"Didn't we give you a reference?" said Jenny. "Think!"

"Good gracious me, of course you did!" exclaimed the agent, passing his hand nervously across his brow. "I remember now."

"You have it in your pocket."

The agent put his hand in his pocket and drew out a letter :—

"The Misses Smith are highly respectable young ladies, and you will find them most desirable tenants."

"Such a testimonial from the Lord Mayor should be sufficient," said Mabel.

"From the Lord Mayor!" gasped the agent. "Of course—how stupid of me to forget that you gave me this. But I really don't remember putting it in my pocket."

"You have so much business to attend to," said Jenny, sweetly.

"Yes—er—quite so. I will give you a receipt for the rent, and the hall porter will give you the keys."

When the two young ladies had left the

office the agent went to the cold water bottle, poured some over his handkerchief, and bathed his brow.

"I can't be very well to-day," he said; "I feel quite confused. Fancy my asking those charming young ladies for a reference, and I had the Lord Mayor's letter in my pocket all the time."

. . . . . .

When the two fairies left the estate agent's office they felt quite happy.

"You see, Sunbeam—" said Daydream.

"Call me Mabel, dear. It would make people stare so if they overheard you calling me by a fairy name."

"You are quite right. We cannot be too careful. I was going to say, you see how easy it is for fairies to act as mortals."

"Yes; but I think you had better leave off waving your umbrella as a wand. All these mortals have seen pantomimes, and they still read fairy stories; Granny told us so. They will be sure to think of fairies if you make passes with your umbrella while

you are causing magic changes to take place. It is only a habit."

"It has been a fairy habit ever since the beginning of once upon a time, and that makes it rather difficult to grow out of."

"But we must grow out of a good many fairy habits, Jenny, if we do not want our true character to be suspected. There is no necessity for a fairy to wave a wand. We have only to wish for a thing to be done."

"Of course, I know that, Mabel, but I do love the idea of using my neatly-folded little umbrella as a wand. It struck me as such a quaint idea. But I will take care to do the business in the future without attracting attention. Where shall we go now?"

"We have to furnish the flat."

"What shall we do? Go there and change little things that may be lying about into tables and chairs and looking-glasses?"

"My dear Jenny, you forget that the hall-porter is a mortal. He knows the flat

is empty. If he discovered that it had been furnished in five minutes, without a single thing being carried up the stairs, he would go talking about it all over the neighbourhood. Let us go to Tottenham Court Road and buy our furniture, and have it sent home and fixed up at once."

The Fairies hailed an omnibus. The driver stopped in the middle of the road, which was rather dirty.

"Pull up at the kerb, Jim," shouted the conductor. "These young ladies don't want to walk in the mud."

"That's a very nice, polite young man," whispered Mabel to Jenny as they got into the omnibus. "He shall have the wish of his heart."

Now the conductor was quite a young fellow, and his great desire was to have a moustache. He had a sweetheart, and she had once admitted to him that she had always dreamed of a husband with a beautiful moustache. The young conductor had tried everything he knew to make one grow, but only a few straggling silky hairs had

been the result. These he stroked and twisted constantly.

Directly Mabel and Jenny were comfortably seated in the 'bus, Mabel wished that the young man might have the desire of his heart.

The young conductor's moustache began to grow rapidly. He was stroking his lip at the time and drew his fingers away with a little cry.

Then he put them back again and found that he had quite a fine moustache to play with.

He turned pale and nearly fell off the step.

When the 'bus stopped at a corner the timekeeper on duty looked at the conductor and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Where did you get that mustarsh from?" he shouted. "Has it growed in the night?"

The young conductor flushed crimson. "I—I can't make it out," he said. "It seems to have come on suddenly between Southampton Street and this."

The company's inspector came up at that moment and looked at the conductor.

"Here, this won't do," he said, rather angrily; "what do you mean by wearing a false moustache on duty? I shall report you!"

"It isn't false," gasped the conductor. "Look!" He took hold of his new moustache and tugged at it hard.

The timekeeper and the inspector stared. The driver, who had almost fallen off the box when he saw the magical change which had occurred on his conductor's upper lip, began to joke.

"What have you been using to make it come on like that, Tom?" he cried. "There ought to be a fortune in it."

The two fairies, who were the only passengers in the 'bus, were rather amused at first, but when they saw that the polite young man was getting very uncomfortable they determined to put him at his ease. So Mabel murmured a few fairy words which made the moustache invisible to everybody but the conductor and his sweetheart, and a

few more words which made the driver, the inspector and the timekeeper forget all about it.

The 'bus started again, and the young conductor, released from the chaff of his superiors, began to feel quite jubilant about his moustache. He knew it would be such a delightful surprise to his sweetheart.

The fairies got out at Tottenham Court Road and went into a large establishment which exhibited the most beautiful furniture in the windows.

A salesman came forward at once to attend to them.

"We have taken a flat in Mazenod Mansions, Bloomsbury," said Mabel, "and we want it comfortably and tastefully furnished during the afternoon."

The salesman hesitated.

"That is rather quick work," he said. "The carpets must be planned first, you know, and the recesses and spaces measured. We shall require three or four days."

"Mabel," whispered Jenny, "I think you had better let me use my umbrella."

"Very well, dear. But do it unostentatiously."

Jenny moved away to look at a wardrobe, stood behind it and waved her umbrella.

Then she came back to the salesman.

"We have come to pay you," she said, "for the carpets and furniture and things you are sending us to-day."

"To-day, miss—I thought I said—dear me—I—excuse me—didn't I explain?"

"There was nothing to explain; we ordered the furniture, and there it is at the door loaded up in one of your vans."

The salesman looked out in the street. There was one of the firm's vans; the driver was on the box; half-a-dozen more men were getting on to the tail-board.

The salesman rushed out.

"Where are you going?" he said to the foreman.

"Mazenod Mansions, Bloomsbury, sir, with the carpets and furniture and household things that were ordered last week."

The salesman returned to the fairies.

"A thousand pardons," he said. "I

didn't take the order, and I must have misunderstood you just now. The van is just starting for your flat."

"Thank you; if you will take us to the office we will pay the account."

"It may take some time to make out."

"Oh, no—it was to be ready."

The salesman conducted Sunbeam and Daydream to the office.

Directly they entered and mentioned that they were the Misses Smith, of Mazenod Mansions, a clerk came forward and handed them an account for £228.

Mabel took out her purse to pay, but dropped it on the floor.

Several clerks sprang forward to pick it up, but Jenny stooped and grasped it first.

She made two passes above it with her umbrella—to remove the dust—and handed it to Mabel.

Mabel opened it and took out three crisp bank-notes, two for £100 each and one for £50. She received the change and a receipted bill, and she and her sister were

attended to the door with many bows and smiles.

. . . . . .

That evening the Misses Smith sat in a charming flat in Mazenod Mansions, Bloomsbury. The furniture had been placed in position so rapidly that when the men came down and told the hall-porter they had finished he was dumfounded.

A nice, motherly old lady stood respectfully by the tea-table talking to her young mistresses.

"I hope you will be comfortable with us, Mrs Twitterby," said Mabel. "You will have the whole responsibility of the flat, for we shall be away a great deal. You are quite satisfied with the maids we have engaged?"

"Oh, yes, miss, certainly. It was quite providential, so to speak, my dear young ladies, your coming to the registry office for a housekeeper as you did; for the cook and housemaid who had left with me owing to poor Lady Jenkins's death were there too, and you were able to engage us all together

—quite a little family party, as one might say."

"You will find us good mistresses; all we ask is that you will be good to us in return, and I am sure you will, if looks go for anything."

"Thank you, miss," said Mrs Twitterby. "I'm sure I'll do all I can to make you happy, and if it's not a liberty—you two young ladies being orphans, as you tell me—you'll find me motherly."

Mrs Twitterby smiled herself out of the room, and the Misses Smith were left alone.

"This is really very comfortable, Jenny," said Mabel, looking at the cheerful fire and the bright electric light.

"Yes, dear," replied Jenny; "but we must not forget that we are here for others and not for ourselves. We did not leave Fairyland to sit in armchairs by the fire."

The sisters went to the window and looked out into the night. The lamps were lighted. On the opposite side of the way a boy was walking along with evening newspapers

under his arm. He was shouting out some special items.

"Let us have a newspaper, Jenny," said Mabel.

A moment later Mrs Twitterby entered.

"Did you order an evening paper, miss?" she said.

"Yes; tell the boy to leave one regularly."

"Yes, miss."

Mrs Twitterby retired, and the sisters sat down and spread the paper out on the table and read it.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mabel, "what dreadful things!"

"Yes," said Jenny; "I almost wish we hadn't bought this paper. Look at this case, for instance. Here is a poor woman whose husband has been out of work for months, and who has been struggling to keep the home together. She complains to a magistrate that everything has been seized by the landlord under a distraint, and sold for less than a quarter of its value."

"How cruel!" exclaimed Mabel. "Jenny, we must begin work at once."

"Together?"

"No, dear. I'll go and look after the poor woman. You can call on the landlord."

. . . . . .

When Mrs Twitterby came in later in the evening she found the young ladies had gone out and left a note saying that she was not to sit up for them.

"Oh, but I shall," said Mrs Twitterby. "I think it only my duty, being motherly as I am, to—"

Before she could complete the sentence Mrs Twitterby was in bed and fast asleep.

CHAPTER II

IN THE WORKHOUSE

It was only a little six-roomed house in a side street in Deptford, but to Tom Truby and his wife it had been a dear home haven ever since the day they came to it a young married couple full of love and the hope of life.

Tom was a skilled workman employed at the docks, earning good wages, and he had in the days of his bachelorhood put by enough to furnish the little house neatly and comfortably before he asked Annie Wilson to come and be the smiling mistress of his heart and home.

Annie had lived all her life in the country until she came to London to help her aunt, who had a little general shop in Deptford, and was a widow and getting old.

Annie and Tom met and fell in love and kept company, principally in the little room

behind the shop, because aunt could not spare her niece for the evening saunter that young engaged couples delight in.

Aunt liked Tom, and was sure he would make Annie a good husband, but she was not anxious for the marriage to be hastened because, like most old ladies, she was selfish, and she wanted Annie's services as long as she could keep them.

So Tom and Annie just kept company, and were very happy with the prospect of one day being happier still.

One morning the old lady did not get up, and the doctor had to be sent for. A week later the shutters were up all day. When the old lady's affairs were gone into, it was found that she had left such property as she had to her niece. When the liabilities of the little business had been settled there was just £40 in cash, and a few simple, old-fashioned trinkets for Annie to take.

The shop was let to a new tenant, who paid a small sum for the goodwill, and Annie being without a home Tom thought it high time for him to marry her and take her to his.

Then came ten years of contentment and well-being and a little boy and a little girl.

The happiest hour of every day to Tom Truby was when he came home from his work and found the kettle singing on the fire and his wife smiling at the tea-table, and his two little ones waiting to clamber on his knees and be romped with and petted.

Sometimes half jokingly Tom would say to his wife, "Annie, we can't always expect to be as happy as we are now, I suppose, dear?"

But Annie would laugh and say, "Why not? Father used to say, 'A good start's half the race,' and we've certainly had a good start, Tom."

Annie often thought of her words when the sun went down upon their lives and it seemed to her that it was never to rise again.

One day they received notice that the property on which they lived had been sold. They had a new landlord, a Mr Joseph Jarboy. Mr Jarboy raised the rents all round at the earliest opportunity, and Tom had to pay the extra or go.

The coming of Jarboy into their lives marked a great change in the fortunes of the Trubys.

Soon afterwards there was illness in the home. The children began to ail and the doctor was called in. Then Annie was stricken down, and for two months lay between life and death. The sickness of his household made a big hole in Tom's little savings. But he still managed to pay his way and keep out of debt.

Then came the crowning misfortune. Tom met with an accident. He was coming home one evening when he slipped on a piece of orange peel on the pavement and injured his wrist and broke his leg.

He was sent to the hospital, and remained there for weeks. When he was discharged it was found that his wrist was permanently injured, and he would never be able to work at his trade again.

Annie made a brave effort to earn a little money, and that, with what Tom had from his club while he was on the sick list, kept the wolf from the door, but there was

not sufficient to pay the rent in full when quarter-day came.

Mr Jarboy's collector took all the poor woman could give him, and Mr Jarboy put in a distraint for the balance, seized the furniture, and informed Tom that it had only fetched sufficient to pay what was due.

Tom went out in despair to look for work of some kind that he might be able to do in spite of his crippled hand, and the poor wife went to a magistrate and told her story.

She was informed that she could take out a summons for excessive distraint. And she had at that time exactly fourpence in the world.

This was the story that Sunbeam and Daydream read in the evening paper just before they left their flat in Bloomsbury to see if fairies could be as useful in the twentieth century as they used to be in the happy days of "once upon a time."

. . . . . .

Tom Truby and his wife and their two

little ones stood before the grim gates of the workhouse.

"I'd rather have died than brought you to this, Annie," groaned the man; "but the children must have shelter for the night, and so must you."

"Oh, Tom," sobbed the woman, "if we once go into this place there is no hope for us!"

"I'm not going in, dear; I only want to know that you and the little ones have at least food and a roof over your heads. I'm going to keep my liberty and look for employment. There must be something I can do that will at least keep us from the parish. Don't fret, dear. Be brave, and make me brave. This is a hard blow, but I'm not going to lie down under it and give up the fight."

The wicket-door in the workhouse gate opened, and the man was about to enter and explain that he wanted shelter for his wife and children when a charming young lady, beautifully dressed, put him gently aside and stepped in first.

"What do you want, miss?" said the porter at the gate, touching his hat as the young lady smiled at him.

"This lady and gentleman are my friends," was the reply. "They are wealthy philanthropists staying with their family in London. They are studying our Poor Law system, and are very anxious to see the internal arrangements of this palatial home of rest for the aged and asylum for the financially unfortunate."

The porter glanced at the little group and rubbed his eyes. He certainly thought when he opened the wicket that he was dealing with poor wretches applying for admission. But these people were quite elegantly clad. The man had on a fashionable overcoat and a high silk hat. The woman might have stepped out of a carriage in Bond Street, and the children were, as he explained afterwards to his wife, as prettily dressed as anything you can see on the wax figures in the clothiers' shops at Christmastime.

"This way, if you please," said the porter

as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment. "I will take you to the master's quarters."

"Come," said the young lady to Tom; "you remember that when I was introduced to you yesterday at the Carlton in the lounge after dinner I promised you should see over one of our typical workhouses."

"Yes," said Tom, raising his hat and passing his hand over his brow, "I—er—think I do remember something of the sort; but I've been very ill. Perhaps it happened while I was light-headed," he added. "Do you remember it, Annie?" he asked, turning to his wife.

"I—have a—a vague remembrance—but—oh, dear! I have such a singing in my ears."

The young lady touched Mrs Truby gently on the arm.

"You must remember it!" she said softly.

"Oh, yes, of course I do now—quite distinctly. Yesterday, at the—where did you say?"

"The Carlton."

"Yes, yes; of course. This is all so new and strange to me, I am a little confused."

"That is very natural," said the young lady.

"Let me see," said Tom; "I don't quite remember your name."

"Miss Smith—Miss Mabel Smith, of Bloomsbury."

"Of course—of course."

As the little party crossed the big courtyard of the workhouse and came into the lamplight, the children—who had been staring at their elegantly-dressed mother—caught sight of their own clothes.

"Oh, mamma," exclaimed the little girl, "look what a lovely frock's grown on me! And Willie's just like the little boys in the picture book."

The fairy stepped between the children, took their hands and pressed them gently.

"You have always been nicely dressed and happy," she said. "If you were ever poor and saw your mamma and papa cry, that was when you had a bad dream through eating too much plum pudding."

"Oh, yes," laughed the children; "of course, it must have been."

The porter led the way to a wing of the workhouse, and, conducting the party up a flight of stairs, pressed the electric bell at the side of a doorway on the landing.

When the door had been opened he left the party in a little ante-room in which a bright fire was burning, and went to see the master to explain.

But before he went Miss Smith gave him a letter in an unfastened envelope.

"Please ask Mr Bibbs to read that," she said.

The workhouse master, who was just sitting down to a birthday dinner with some friends, looked up angrily at the porter.

"What do you want?" he said. "If there's anything wrong, go to the deputy. The idea of coming to me, when I'm entertaining friends at my birthday party!"

"Beg pardon, sir," said the porter, humbly, "but there's some ladies and a gentleman to see you, and they've sent this note."

"Botheration!" exclaimed the master, gruffly.

He snatched the letter from the porter, glanced at it, and instantly his whole demeanour changed. He read the letter aloud to his wife and their guests.

"'The President of the United States will take it as a personal favour if Mr Bibbs'—he knows my name, fancy that!—'will show Miss Mabel Smith and Mr and Mrs Truby, of New York, over his workhouse, which is understood to be one of the best-managed in the United Kingdom. The President will be happy to place any facilities at the service of Mr Bibbs should Mr Bibbs at any time visit America.'"

Mr Bibbs gasped with delight. The guests said "Hear! hear!" Mr Bibbs, glowing with pride, glanced at the gramophone in the room. He wondered if "Hail, Columbia!" or "The Star-Spangled Banner" was among the records.

But he was keeping his illustrious guests waiting. He hurried into the adjoining

apartment accompanied by his wife. The master and the matron bowed and smiled.

"We are delighted—it is a great honour," said Mr Bibbs. "Any friends of the President, for whom I need not say I entertain the highest respect, not to say admiration—"

The Fairy Sunbeam stepped forward.

"It is very good of you, Mr Bibbs," she said. "Allow me. Mr and Mrs Truby; Mr Bibbs—Mrs Bibbs."

"Very pleased to meet you," said Mr Bibbs, grasping each guest warmly by the hand; "and the little lady and gentleman—ah! real young Americans—you can see that at a glance. A grand country yours, sir."

"Yes," said Tom, as if seeking for the right word. "I have heard so."

"That is real American humour, my dear," said Mr Bibbs, turning to his wife. "Mr Truby lives in New York, and he has heard that America is a grand country. Splendid!—as good as anything in Mark Twain."

"Yes," tittered Mrs Bibbs; "or Dickens."

"Ah! Dickens," exclaimed Mr Bibbs; "you have read our great writer, of course. But he did not do justice to our workhouses. I hope you won't look upon me as a Mr Bumble, or my wife as a Mrs Corney. Burlesque, sir — outrageous burlesque. *Oliver Twist*, sir, has done more harm—But I am running on—forgive me—when I get on that subject I always do run on."

"Ask them to dine with us," whispered Mrs Bibbs.

"Ah—yes—I—" Mr Bibbs paused. "Is there enough?" he whispered to his wife.

"Yes; I'll help the others short."

"My honoured American guests," said Mr Bibbs, "I am celebrating my birthday in a homely English fashion. Might I venture to ask you to join our little party?"

"Certainly," replied the Fairy Sunbeam. "Mr and Mrs Truby had an early lunch, and as I suppose a tour of the workhouse will take some time—"

"Quite so; I should like you to see every-

thing. A little dinner first will make us all better acquainted."

The little party followed Mr and Mrs Bibbs, and were introduced to the other guests, who rose to greet them and were delighted to have the honour of dining with American millionaires.

Mrs Bibbs glanced round a little nervously. "I'm afraid you'll be a little crowded," she said; "and—er—we shall want some more chairs."

But to her astonishment there was plenty of room at the table. It seemed to have grown suddenly two leaves larger, but, of course, that was impossible. And there were vacant chairs, and knives and forks, and napkins and glasses all set out for the new guests.

"How very thoughtful of Susan," said Mrs Bibbs to herself; "she must have heard me inviting these people to join us. That girl is a perfect treasure."

Everybody thought the Trubys delightful. They hadn't a trace of American accent, and they thoroughly enjoyed their

dinner. So did little Miss and Master Truby.

There was no fear of a shortage. Mrs Bibbs marvelled a little at the way the *entrees* went round, and the fowls seemed to be all wings and breast. She didn't remember having ordered quite so much of anything. But, of course, she must have over-ordered, or how could there be plenty and to spare with five extra guests ?

It was a sumptuous dinner. Mr Bibbs at any other time would have reproached his wife with extravagance. But the honour of entertaining the friends of the President of the United States put all other considerations out of his head.

And what excellent champagne it was ! He had no idea he had anything so good in his cellar. And the dessert ! There was a splendid pine-apple, and there were grapes that would have been the pride of any nobleman's hot-house. He wondered where his wife got such beautiful fruit, and what it had cost. But he said nothing. Neither did Mrs Bibbs. She was astonished too. She

concluded the fruiterer had delivered somebody else's order by mistake.

At dessert the oldest friend, the local undertaker, proposed Mr Bibbs's health, and made one or two professional jokes, as he always did. But Mr Bibbs did not smile as usual. He looked rather sternly at his oldest friend. Surely he might have kept his trade in the background in the presence of millionaires from New York

But when Mr Bibbs rose to reply he was all smiles. He said very little about himself—a great deal about America—and he concluded by proposing the health of the President, and coupling with it the name of the Hon. Thomas Truby.

And at that moment from an adjoining room, in obedience to previously-given instructions, the gramophone was turned on with "The Honeysuckle and the Bee." It was the nearest thing to an American national air that could be found among the records.

Mr Truby rose with much diffidence. At first he hesitated, but Miss Mabel Smith,

who was seated next him, touched his arm gently, and immediately he began to speak with much humour and eloquence.

The guests were delighted. Mrs Truby gazed at Tom in admiration. She felt that they must have lived in America all their lives, and have had a bad dream about Deptford and Mr Jarboy while crossing the Atlantic.

When Mr Truby sat down Mr Bibbs led off the applause by waving his napkin in the air.

All the guests waved their napkins and cheered. Then, when they had all sung "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow," the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room and the gentlemen lit big cigars.

Mr Bibbs had, he thought, provided a box of fourpenny cigars for the occasion. But when the maid laid the cigar-box before him he marvelled at its size. He opened it, and the cigars astonished him. They were very large and fine, and certainly worth half-a-crown apiece.

He supposed somebody had sent him a present for his birthday.

Half an hour later the gentlemen joined the ladies. The dinner had been an early one, and it was now nine o'clock.

The master had sent word to his staff that everything was to be arranged for a distinguished visitor's inspection. The inmates were to be gathered together in the dining-hall at supper, which would be a special feast in honour of the master's birthday.

When Mr and Mrs Bibbs entered the dining-hall with their guests the inmates rose and gave three ringing cheers.

"They always do that on my birthday," said Mr Bibbs. "I give them the supper myself, you know."

"And a very excellent supper too," said the Fairy Sunbeam, as she passed smiling before a row of happy paupers.

"Yes," said Mr Bibbs, "it's really good soup, you know, and—"

He glanced at a table and stopped in amazement. Then he recovered himself and gasped out, "And mutton chops and

baked potatoes and cold apple tart, and celery and Stilton cheese, and—good gracious, Mrs Jones, you've got oysters!"

"Yes, sir," said old Mrs Jones, rising and giving a little bob. "I can't eat meat so late as this, not being used to it, so I've had two dozen natives."

"Yes, yes; quite right," gurgled Mr Bibbs, looking at Mrs Bibbs with a sort of am-I-awake-or-dreaming expression. "Well, I hope you've all enjoyed yourselves."

"Yes, sir," shouted the eight hundred inmates seated at the feast in the great hall; "thanks to you, sir!"

Mr Bibbs groaned and turned to the deputy.

"Who ordered these things?" he said.

"I don't know, sir, But they were sent in. Nobody seems to know who sent 'em. But before I could make inquiries at the gate and in the kitchen, the chops and the pastry and things had all got on to the tables somehow, and the inmates was at 'em."

"Sent in?" murmured Mr Bibbs, with a sigh of relief. "Some unknown benefactor

of the poor. Thank goodness for that! But, Tomkins!"

"Yes, sir."

"You'd better send for the doctor and ask him to stay on the premises. The inmates will be rolling about in the agonies of indigestion half the night. What have they been drinking?"

"The old ladies have had a glass of port each, sir, and the old gentlemen a bottle of Bass."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr Bibbs. "This is red revolution! I shall have the guardians up in arms, and the whole of the Local Government Board will be here to-morrow in motor-cars."

"Thank you so much," said the Fairy Sunbeam, as she shook hands with Mr and Mrs Bibbs; "my friends from America are delighted with what they have seen, and I am sure they will cable to the President an enthusiastic account of the humane and generous manner in which you treat the inmates in your workhouses."

Mr and Mrs Bibbs accompanied their

guests to the exit, and hoped to have the pleasure of seeing them again.

When the workhouse gates had closed with a dull clang Mr Bibbs turned to his wife.

"Eliza," he said, "I shall see a brain specialist to-morrow—I am perfectly certain that I am suffering from a serious form of hallucination."

. . . . .

"And now," said the Fairy Sunbeam, as she stood with her new friends outside the workhouse, "where are you going to spend the rest of the evening? I suppose you are going home?"

The Trubys looked at each other. The fairy had allowed them to remember something of the past.

"Home!" sighed the woman; "we have no home. The little house we have lived so happily in for years has been taken from us—the furniture seized and sold. We haven't a penny in the world."

"You are mistaken," said the fairy. "You forget that you have changed your clothes. Feel in your pocket, Mr

Truby; I am sure there is some money there."

Tom Truby put his hand in his trousers pocket, and with an exclamation of astonishment drew it out again.

It was filled with sovereigns.

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed his wife, "that money is not ours. You must have somebody else's clothes on."

"No, no," Sunbeam said, smiling; "don't you remember that an unknown friend presented you this afternoon with new clothes? Perhaps it was your old employer, and this money is a little subscription got up among your old fellow-workers."

"I suppose that must be it," murmured Tom. "My memory seems to be very bad. My illness must have affected it."

"You had better go to a nice, quiet hotel for the night."

"Will they take us in without luggage?" said Tom.

"But you have luggage," exclaimed the fairy. "There it is on the four-wheel cab that brought you to the workhouse, and has

been waiting for you all this time at half-a-crown an hour."

"So it is," said Mrs Truby; "but I'm as bad as Tom—I forget everything."

Sunbeam saw her *proteges* into the cab. "You'll stay at the hotel to-night," she said, "and to-morrow I want you to meet me with Mrs Truby and the children at Deptford Lower Road Station at one o'clock; or, better still, come to your house at half-past."

"But the house is empty. We have been turned out of it, and everything we have in the world has been seized for the balance of the rent."

"Yes, I know," said the fairy. "But I am going to call on the landlord. Perhaps I may be able to arrange matters with him more satisfactorily than you would."

Then the Fairy Sunbeam closed the door of the cab, told the cabman which hotel to drive to, and kissing her hand to the children, who were smiling at her from the cab window, she wished herself in Bloomsbury.

It was quicker to go that way than in a hansom, and the Fairy Sunbeam was particularly anxious to see her sister at once and learn how far she had carried matters with the wicked landlord.

CHAPTER III

THE MONEY-LENDER

MR JOSEPH HENRY JARBOY was the proprietor of an establishment which called itself "The Friendly Loan Society." There was no society. It was all Jarboy. The Friendly Loan Society advertised its willingness to advance sums from £5 to £5000 on your note of hand, without security, and every loan was repayable by easy instalments. But when you had parted with the preliminary inquiry fees and wanted some money, you found that the note of hand generally consisted of a bill of sale upon your furniture, and that the Friendly had a very unfriendly way of calculating interest.

As Mr Jarboy was constantly engaged in selling up his clients, he had a well-organised staff of brokers' men under his control, and a well-thought-out system of sale by auction

which enabled him to sell the furniture and effects of his victims for about a sixth of the value to bidders who were merely bidding on his behalf.

Doing an extensive business on these lines, Mr Jarboy had accumulated a nice little fortune, and had invested some of his capital in house property of the poorer class. He liked poor tenants because they were more easily imposed upon, cheated, and robbed than rich ones. In the matter of illegal and excessive distraint Mr Jarboy had a reputation which caused him to be much admired by men of his own kidney, and his system of seizing furniture, selling it at knock-out prices to himself, and sending it to a furniture warehouse which he carried on under another name was held by experts to be absolutely "great."

Mr Jarboy was a stout, round-faced, bald-headed, rather benevolent-looking man of fifty. He looked at the world through a pair of gold spectacles, and came to town every day from his charming house, Morn-

ing View, Hampstead, where he had a wife, a son, two daughters, a large garden, and a fine conservatory.

At Hampstead, in the bosom of his family or entertaining his guests—who were ignorant of his "profession," but well aware of the excellence of his kitchen and his wine-cellar—he was a very different person from the "managing director" of the Friendly Loan Society, or Mr Joseph Jarboy, the terror of his poor tenants.

He had kept his real name for business, and had assumed another one early in his career for private and social purposes. He was known at Hampstead as Mr Joseph Henry. He had his private banking account in that name, and as Mrs and the Misses Henry his wife and daughters issued and accepted invitations. It was as Mr Joseph Henry, Junior, that his son cultivated local acquaintances and invited his young men friends to spend an occasional evening in the billiard-room of Morning View.

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Mr Jarboy generally quitted the premises

of the Friendly Loan Society at six, leaving his head clerk to look after business till eight, the hour to which the office remained open for the convenience of borrowers employed in commercial and other pursuits during the day.

Mr Jarboy's deputy had at one time been managing clerk to a firm of solicitors; but he had been of a convivial and sporting turn of mind and had lost his position.

Then he got into the clutches of the Friendly, and was on the point of being sold up when he managed to effect a compromise. Mr Jarboy having discovered in conversation that Sam Snargles was "smart" and might be exceedingly useful, it was arranged that the legal knowledge Mr Snargles possessed should be engaged at a weekly salary, a portion of which was to be retained until the balance of indebtedness had been wiped off.

It happened on the day Miss Jenny Smith left her flat in Bloomsbury to set out in search of him that Mr Jarboy stayed later than usual at the office. There was

to be an evening party at Morning View. Dancing was to commence at ten. Mr Jarboy had arranged not to dine at home, in order that the dining-room might be cleared out and prepared for the supper which was to follow the ball. So he ordered the brougham to come for him at 7.30, and stayed on at the Friendly.

It was about seven o'clock, and in the outer office the clerks were dealing with applications for loans and renewals and with pleas for forbearance.

Snargles, in an inner office, was interviewing special cases and informing unhappy-looking men and weeping women that "extra grace" was not kept in stock at the Friendly, and that the brokers wouldn't be taken out till the debt and "expenses" had been settled in full.

In his private office Mr Jarboy was reading the letter of a young clerk, who said that to sue him would lead to his instant dismissal, and that he had a widowed mother of whom he was the sole support.

Mr Jarboy read the letter, laid down the

choice Havana he was smoking, and looked at the particulars endorsed on the back of the letter: "Borrowed £15 eighteen months ago. Has paid interest £16. Balance of loan still due, £12. Nothing paid this week."

Mr Jarboy took a blue pencil and wrote across the clerk's letter, "Sue at once."

At that moment an old lady, bent with age, and who hobbled painfully with the aid of a neatly-rolled umbrella, made her way to the counter in the outer office.

"I want to see Mr Jarboy, if you please," said the crone.

The clerk in charge looked at the old lady.

"What can I do for you, ma'am?" he said, with a grin. "Do you want a thousand on your note of hand?"

"No, thank you," replied the old lady. "I wish to see Mr Jarboy on important business."

The clerk was about to reply rudely, when he noticed that the eyes of the old lady were fixed upon his.

He said afterwards that he felt an electric shock. His whole manner altered. He bowed to the old lady respectfully, and said she had better see Mr Snargles. He pointed to the inner door, and the old lady hobbled towards it. But before she opened it she turned to the clerk and waved her umbrella at him.

"That's her way of saying 'Thank you,' I suppose," thought the clerk. Then he turned to the people who were waiting for him to attend to them.

There was a widow who wanted £5 on her note of hand "as advertised."

"Certainly, ma'am," said the clerk, and he took £5 from the cash-box and pushed it towards her.

"Don't I sign anything, sir?" asked the widow, as she folded the note up carefully and put it in her purse.

"Oh, don't trouble about that. Send me your I O U on a post-card at your convenience."

The widow went out smiling.

"What's for you, my good man?" said

the clerk, turning to a respectable-looking artisan.

"I can't pay that last instalment this week, sir," replied the man, sorrowfully. "The missis is desperate bad, and I've had to give her port wine and things. I'm very sorry, but—"

"Oh, don't worry, my good man; take your own time. Wife bad, is she? I'm sorry—I know what that means. I've got a sick wife myself. Here—have another couple of pounds, and pay it back when you like."

The man took the money and gasped his thanks. Then he went outside and made a little speech to the passers-by.

"That's a real Friendly Society, and no mistake," he said. "Why, they gave me money without my even asking for it!"

The clerk attended to the other applicants joyfully. His smiling face was a picture. Every moment he grew more generous. At last, in an access of benevolent enthusiasm, he emptied the cash-box of its contents and flung the gold and bank-notes over the

counter for the people to scramble for.

Mr Snargles heard the shout of joy and the scuffle just as he was using abusive language to an old lady who had hobbled into his office, and who refused to leave when ordered out.

He sprang up alarmed. He thought that thieves must have raided the premises.

But, just as he was going to rush into the outer office, the old lady touched him on the shoulder with her umbrella.

"Don't go," she said; "it is only one of the clerks giving away the ill-gotten gains of your employer."

"Ah!" replied Snargles; "ill-gotten—that's the word. If ever there was a heartless villain it's Jarboy, and I'm really as bad, though I get precious little by it."

"I am glad you see it in that light," said the old lady. "Be a reformed character."

Snargles looked at the aged dame and burst into sobs. He was very much alarmed for he had not shed a tear since the last thrashing he had as a schoolboy.

As soon as he could control his emotion he got up and took his hat.

"I will leave this place for ever," he cried; "I will shake the dust of its iniquity from my feet. I will try and earn an honest character and lead an honest life, if I have to take ten shillings a week to begin with. But first I will give Jarboy a bit of my mind. Come and hear me do it."

He went out of his room along the passage and the old lady followed him.

He opened a door and entered Jarboy's private office.

"Halloa, Snargles! what's the matter?" exclaimed the chief, as he saw that his head clerk's eyes were red with weeping.

"Matter, you villain!" exclaimed Snargles; "the matter is that I give you notice. I loathe myself for ever having taken a farthing from you—you blood-sucker, you grinder of the faces of the poor, you usurer, you rascal, you vampire!"

"Snargles," yelled Jarboy, "you are drunk! Begone, sir, or I'll kick you out."

He sprang up mad with passion, and was

about to seize Snargles by the throat, when he caught sight of an old lady standing in the middle of the room.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed furiously. "How dare you come here?"

The old lady looked at him, and as he came towards her touched his shoulder with her umbrella.

"What—you dare to assault me, woman! Are you Snargles's mother, or—"

He stopped. A numb feeling came over him for a moment, then the blood rushed to his head.

"I—I haven't the pleasure of knowing your name, but what can I do for you, madam?" he stammered out.

"Give Mr Snargles a cheque for a hundred pounds. It will enable him to start a new life honestly."

"Certainly—certainly," said the money-lender.

He sat down at his desk, took out his cheque-book, and began to write.

"One hundred pounds; that isn't much, is it, Snargles? Why, I must have made

a lot more out of you than that before I had you ruined and in my clutches. I should like to be fair to you, Snargles. Here is a cheque for £200. Take it, my boy, and may you be happy."

Snargles took the cheque and pressed his employer's hand. "Thank you, Mr Jarboy," he whimpered, for his tears had begun to flow again. "I intend to be a reformed character for the rest of my days, and I hope —I sincerely hope, Mr Jarboy—that you will be one too."

He put the cheque in his pocket, shook his employer warmly by the hand, gave the old lady a grateful glance, and, turning into the passage, went out of the private front door into the street. He passed several public-houses without going into one—a thing he had not done for years—and, making his way to a temperance hall, asked to see the secretary, and signed the pledge. In the meantime Mr Jarboy had turned to the old lady.

"Now, madam, that we are alone, may I inquire if you have any further business

with me—I am rather in a hurry—my brougham is at the door—I have a party at my house to-night."

"Then," said the old lady, "I need not detain you. You will, I am sure, be pleased to know that your clients in the front office have been granted loans without security as advertised. That is enough for the present."

"Thank you; that is very nice. I should like to say what I think—but I don't feel quite myself."

"No," said the old lady, "of course you don't; therefore you will not feel the loss of your money and the loss of your confidential clerk. Be yourself again!"

She waved her umbrella and instantly Mr Jarboy turned upon her furiously. "Begone, you hag!" he said. "How dare you come in here and hinder me when I'm in a hurry?"

He took the old lady by the shoulders and pushed her roughly out of the room.

Then he put on his hat and overcoat and passed through his offices.

"Halloa!" he said. "Snargles gone? Like his impudence, leaving before time."

He went into the clerks' office and found it empty.

"I'll sack the lot to-morrow," he growled. "I suppose they thought I'd gone."

He called to the housekeeper to turn out the lights and lock the door after him, and went out.

As he stepped into his brougham he caught sight of the old woman standing under a lamp-post, and he shook his fist at her.

She shook her umbrella at him in return.

"We shall meet again," she said, as the brougham passed, Jarboy glowering at her from the open window. "Keep the fourth waltz for me at the ball to-night."

Jarboy lay back in his brougham and roared with laughter.

. . . . . .

The Henrys of Morning View, Hampstead, always did things magnificently. Everybody who had the privilege of being on their invitation list said so.

The ball, which was being given in celebration of Miss Jessica Henry's eighteenth birthday, was expected to be—in the expressive language of the son of the house—"a real knock-out." No expense had been spared, and several new acquaintances of superior social standing had accepted invitations.

Mr Henry, Senior, had arrived home shortly after eight in a nervy condition and looking rather worried, and his wife and daughters had anxiously inquired what was the matter with him.

Mr Henry thought he had fallen asleep in the brougham and had had a bad dream—a sort of nightmare—which had upset him. In the dream some unpleasant and annoying things had happened at the office. The dream seemed so real that when he woke up as the carriage stopped at Morning View he was trembling and felt dazed, as one often does when one comes out of a nightmare.

Mr Henry had a little old brandy, felt better, dismissed the remembrance of his nightmare, and prepared to play the mag-

nificent host to the large and distinguished company he had bidden to the ball.

Shortly after ten o'clock the guests began to arrive, and at eleven the White Wallachian Band, specially engaged, commenced the first waltz of the evening.

Mr Henry gazed admiringly at the gay scene. He did not dance himself, so he was able to stand aside and glow with pride at the evident appreciation of his guests. The scene was fairylike. The floral decorations were superb ; the draping and lighting of the ballroom a happy combination of the daring and the dreamy.

Mr Henry saw his elder daughter, Julia, dancing with a young man whose uncle was a magnate of Mincing Lane, and his younger daughter, Jessica, sitting the dance out in the conservatory with the eldest son of a City baronet.

He glowed as he surveyed the result of his genial extravagance in the matter of hospitality, and he chuckled as he wondered what his guests would think of the supper. He had " spread himself " upon that supper.

It had been arranged regardless of cost, and the caterer had received *carte blanche*. The host had made only one stipulation : it was to be the swaggerest supper that had ever been seen in Hampstead.

The fourth waltz had just commenced when Mrs Henry broke away from a few old acquaintances who had only been invited to be " paralysed," and who were complimenting the hostess rather effusively. She went to her husband.

" Joe," she exclaimed, " who is that lovely girl standing in the doorway ? "

Mr Henry followed his wife's gaze and uttered a cry of enthusiastic admiration.

" My word, Ju, she's a stunner and no mistake. And look at her diamonds ! "

" They are superb," said Mrs Henry. " That diamond star in her hair must be worth a thousand pounds at least."

" I suppose she's a sister of somebody here we don't know. I must go and find her a partner."

Mr Henry worked his way carefully through the dancers, and reaching the

beautiful stranger gave her a smile and a bow.

"You must let me find you a partner for this dance," he said.

"Oh, thank you," replied the young lady. "I love waltzing. Shall we?"

Mr Henry told his wife afterwards that he should never understand to his dying day how he had the audacity to do it, but in a moment his arm was round the waist of the lovely girl, and he was waltzing with her so gracefully that all the other waltzers left off dancing to watch the new couple who had taken the floor.

Mrs Joseph Henry stared at her husband in open-mouthed dismay. He had never been a good dancer. He had not danced for twenty years. And he was waltzing in a manner which would have filled the heart of a Viennese cavalry officer with envy.

"Great Scot, look at the governor!" exclaimed young Mr Henry. And the Misses Henry both ran to their mother, expecting her to faint.

But the host and the belle of the ball

waltzed on together oblivious of everything around them.

The leader of the White Wallachian Band, when he found only one couple dancing, thought it would be better to stop playing. But as the beautiful young lady glided past him she looked at him and whispered, "Play on."

He played on—he played for another ten minutes. He wanted to stop then, but he had lost control of his arm. The baton waved and beat the time; the band followed the baton.

And still the host and the fair unknown waltzed wildly on.

Mrs Henry became alarmed. The Misses Henry suggested that she should interfere. "Pa can't go on," they said; "he'll drop down in a fit and the ball will be ruined."

Young Henry grew angry. "The governor's making an exhibition of himself," he muttered. Then he took the bull by the horns and, stepping forward, said to his father, "Governor, the mater wants you."

The lovely creature who was whirling

round in the arms of the host looked at young Mr Henry, and instantly he began to waltz by himself.

Then the guests laughed. They couldn't help it. It was so absolutely absurd.

Young Mr Henry blushed a brick-dust red and his eyes glared. But he waltzed on. He couldn't stop himself.

His mother bit her lip with vexation and lost her temper. She seized her son by the arm as he waltzed past and screamed "Stop!"

Her interference was fatal to herself. Her son's arm was round her waist in a second, and mother and son were waltzing as wildly as the host and the beautiful visitor.

The spectacle was too much for the guests. The men roared with laughter; the women giggled hysterically.

Suddenly the young lady with the diamond star said in a clear, sweet voice that rang high above the laughter of the guests, "Thank you; that is enough."

Instantly the music ceased. The ex-

hausted musicians fell back in their chairs. The host's arm slipped from his partner's waist, he spun round like a teetotum, and fell in a limp mass on the floor. Young Mr Henry released his mother, who tottered to a seat and swooned. Young Mr Henry staggered backwards and forwards and eventually fell into the arms of a footman who had entered with a tray of ices, and both came down with a crash of broken glass upon the floor.

Fair and beautiful as an evening star, the lovely girl with the priceless diamonds in her hair stood in the centre of the ballroom.

She went to Mr Henry and gave him her hand. "You are all right," she said; "you are not hurt."

Instantly Mr Henry scrambled to his feet.

"Not at all, thank you," he said sweetly. "I never enjoyed a waltz so much in my life. But how ridiculous my wife looked!"

"Oh, no," replied the young lady; "Mrs Henry dances beautifully. She has not suffered any ill-effects from her unwonted exertion."

Mrs Henry came to and opened her eyes at once. She sat up, rose gracefully, and took the young lady's hand.

"My dear," she said, "you must be fatigued. Won't you come and sit down?"

"Thank you," replied the young lady. "Let us all sit down on the floor and keep your son company."

Immediately the entire company sank down on the floor of the ballroom. The lovely girl sat in the centre by herself. The family and the guests sat round her.

The ladies screamed as they found themselves going down. The gentlemen laughed to cover the confusion they felt.

"What are we playing at, Mr Henry?" said the banker's son, as he came down rather heavily. "Is it Forfeits or Hunt the Slipper?"

"I—er—I don't know," stammered the host. "This is something that has been arranged without consulting me."

The belle of the ball beckoned Mr Henry to come near her. Instantly he began to jerk himself across the floor as little boys

do when they play at a game in which they sit down trussed like fowls and try to push one another over.

The guests, in spite of the ridiculous position in which they found themselves, shrieked with laughter. The footman, who was still on the floor, guffawed. This annoyed young Mr Henry so much that in his rage he slapped the footman's face. The footman, who had lived in the best families, stung by such a public outrage, picked up the tray and brought it down heavily on young Mr Henry's head. Then the ladies screamed and the gentlemen cried "Shame!"

The lovely girl appeared to be rather amused.

"Don't let them fight," she whispered to Mr Henry. "Tell them supper is ready, and end the scene. Everybody will get up if you say 'Supper.'"

"Supper!" exclaimed Mr Henry, and instantly the whole company rose. The footman sprang to his feet, helped young Mr Henry up, and apologised to him.

The hum of conversation commenced, and

the guests, glad to see a painful situation relieved, trooped into the supper-room.

The spectacle that awaited them was worthy of the *Arabian Nights*. The supper-room was a bower of roses and softly-shaded lamps. The supper itself was the crowning triumph of a West End caterer's art.

A cry of admiration burst from the lips of the guests.

Mr Henry led the lovely girl to the head of the principal table and begged her to sit at his right hand. The guests took their seats, the waiters commenced to attend to their wants, and the host and his family heaved a sigh of relief.

But before a single fork had touched a single plate a cry of rage went round the room. The tables had all been suddenly tilted up violently, first on one side and then on the other, and lobster salads and jellies, and creams and tipsy cakes, had been precipitated into the laps of the guests.

"This is an insult!" exclaimed the son of the City baronet. "To play your practical jokes on men, Mr Henry, is the

act of a fool; but to ruin the dresses of defenceless women is the act of a knave."

"I didn't do it," groaned the host.

The guests had risen and were trying how best to remove the *debris* from their garments with their serviettes as they made for the door.

But a clear voice rang out above the confusion, and that voice said "Stop!" Instantly the guests stopped and stood as if turned to stone.

The beautiful girl had risen from her seat. "Ladies and gentlemen," she said, "if your dresses are ruined you can buy others. If you are short of money, apply for a loan to our host. He is Mr Joseph Henry Jarboy, of the Friendly Loan Society. He lends money at a hundred per cent., swindles his clients, and robs the poor. Every shilling of his wealth has been wrung from his victims. Look at him—he can't deny it."

Mr Henry buried his face in his hands and wept. The shame was more than he could bear.

Mrs Henry shrieked. The Misses Henry fainted. Young Mr Henry turned as white as a sheet.

"Father!" he exclaimed, "you have ruined my life; I shall enlist under a false name. Farewell!"

Then he fled from the room.

"Look at the giver of this magnificent feast," continued the charming girl. "This very day he has let an honest working man and his wife and children go to the workhouse because he had seized their home and swindled them out of the furniture."

The terrified money-lender fell upon his knees.

"Mercy!" he cried; "spare me the rest!"

"No," replied the lovely visitor, "I will spare you nothing. Your guests will remain here unable to move, unable to speak, until you have righted this cruel wrong. When the last stick of their stolen furniture —yes, stolen—has been replaced and you have made the lease of their house over to the Trubys for ever, then, and then only,

will these people be permitted to leave the scene of your guilty splendour."

"Who are you?" gasped the wretched man, grovelling at the girl's feet. "Who are you that you can do these things?"

"See who I am!" she exclaimed.

He looked up and beheld an old woman bent with years and leaning on a neatly-folded umbrella.

"I am the old crone you flung out of your office this evening," said the woman. She shook the umbrella at him and disappeared.

"Go home—for goodness' sake, go home!" yelled Jarboy, hysterically, to the guests.

But not a soul moved. They were as statues staring in front of them with a vacant expression — motionless — lifeless.

"There'll be an awful scandal," groaned Jarboy; "these people will be here all night and the police will be coming in search of 'missing relatives.' I must go—I must go at once, and apologise to the Trubys for the infamous wrong I did them."

He gave one agonised glance around him and leapt out of an open window. Then, hatless and in evening dress, he fled down the heights of Hampstead in the direction of London.

CHAPTER IV

THE RUINED HOME

At five o'clock in the morning some of the coachmen waiting at Morning View, who had been ordered for three, began to get impatient.

The linkman was requested to go round to the back and see some of the servants and inquire when the festivities were likely to end. He went, and finding the back entrance open entered the premises. In the kitchen he found two or three servants apparently fast asleep. He went into the servants' hall, and there he discovered the band sitting motionless like wax statues round a supper which was untouched.

The linkman, alarmed at the spectacle, ran up the stairs to look for the master of the house and tell him what had happened. He imagined that something in the refreshments had caused the band and the servants

to be attacked by the sleeping sickness. He entered the ballroom and found it deserted. He went into the supper-room, gave one hasty glance, and then fled, uttering cries of terror, out into the roadway and communicated with the police.

Three detectives and a superintendent came from Scotland Yard on a motor, and after a professional examination of the situation the police took possession of Morning View and awaited developments.

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In the meantime Mr Joseph Jarboy fled on through the night until he came to his office. He tried to ring up the housekeeper, who thought she was dreaming of wedding bells and so didn't wake.

When Mr Jarboy found he couldn't get in he asked a passing policeman to help him. The policeman had just arrested an expert burglar with housebreaking implements upon him. The burglar offered, if the gentleman would provide him with a solicitor and counsel at his trial, to "do the job."

The policeman gave his consent and the burglar broke into the premises, and assisted Mr Jarboy and the policeman to climb in after him.

Then Mr Jarboy bade the policeman and the burglar good-night, and, turning up the electric light, proceeded to his safe.

But he had come away without his keys. So he rushed out and ran after the policeman and the burglar and brought them back to break the safe open. For this service the burglar demanded that a K.C. should appear for him at the Old Bailey, and Mr Jarboy put the contract in writing and the policeman witnessed it.

As soon as he was alone Mr Jarboy got his books out of the safe and looked up the case of the Trubys. He found a list of the articles seized and where they had been deposited. They were all in his furniture warehouse, and as there was no entry in the sale ledger of any of them having been disposed of he knew they were all at his disposal.

His journey and the excitement of effect-

ing an entry had exhausted him, and he sat down in his office easy-chair to think things out.

His furniture place would not be open till eight. He did not want to break into that, and he had also to bear in mind that he might not have the luck to meet with another burglar on the way to the police-station.

He remembered also that he had no hat or overcoat, and was in evening dress. He decided to wait till eight, then to buy a morning suit and go to his furniture *depot* in the ordinary business way. As soon as he had come to this decision his nervous system broke down under the strain, and, burying his head in his hands on the office table, he gave way to violent despair.

"Oh, the shame of it!" he moaned. "Exposure before the best people in Hampstead—denounced as a swindling money-lender before the son of a baronet and the nephew of a magnate of Mincing Lane."

Suddenly he remembered the painful position in which he had left his guests.

"That horrible crone must have bewitched them!" he exclaimed. "I remember it all now. They'll be stuck like that till I've given the Trubys back their home. What an awful sensation it will be when the tragedy is discovered! It will be in all the evening papers. The *Star* and the *Evening News* will have my portrait. They'll get it from somewhere—they always do. And if I come out badly in the printing, what an awful villain I shall look!"

He raised his head from the table to look at himself with his mind's eye in the evening papers, and then leapt up with a cry of terror.

Two charming young ladies were in the room with him.

"Where did you come from? I locked the door."

"You cannot lock your doors against us, Joseph Henry Jarboy," said one of the young ladies. "We are fairies."

"Fairies?" stammered Jarboy. "But there aren't any—at least, only in storybooks."

"There haven't been any fairies about for many years, and that is why mortals have left off believing in them. But we are fairies—real fairies, you know. I am the Fairy Sunbeam, and I am looking after the Trubys."

"And I am the Fairy Daydream," said the other young lady, "and I have been looking after you. How did you like that waltz?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Jarboy, "you don't mean to say that you are the charming young lady who wore that magnificent diamond star?"

"Yes, I am."

"And you turned yourself into an old witch at the supper-table?"

"Yes; to punish you."

"Punish me! My dear young lady, you've ruined me! But as you are fairies—look here, can't we come to terms? Be generous!"

"We must be just first."

"But these Trubys—what are they? Working people who got behindhand with

their rent. Do you think that for people in that position it's fair to ruin a man of means, a man looked up to at Hampstead—a man with a wife and daughters ?"

"Fairies are always thorough," replied Sunbeam. "They never do things by halves."

"No, by Jove!" groaned Jarboy. "I should say that nothing like what you've done for me has happened on earth for centuries. You've paralysed everybody in my house. My guests at the present moment—six a.m.—are standing like so many Guy Fawkses in absurd attitudes, and goodness only knows what the police are making of the mystery."

"Your guests will remain in that position until you have restored home and happiness to the Trubys," said the Fairy Daydream, sternly. "You know what you have to do. Do it!"

"But, my dear young ladies—"

"You must excuse us if we decline to continue the conversation," said Fairy Sunbeam. "My sister and I have been out

all night—we must get back to our flat now before our housekeeper is about. She is a mortal—a motherly old soul—and we must respect her prejudices."

In an instant the two fairies had disappeared.

Mr Jarboy rubbed his eyes and ran to the door of his private office. He had bolted it on the inside when he came in—it was still bolted.

"I've read about this sort of thing in the *Arabian Nights*," he groaned, "but I never thought it would happen to me. I shall never feel safe in London again. I might as well be doing business in Bagdad."

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Mrs Twitterby was an early riser. At seven o'clock in the morning she was up and about and superintending the dusting and the preparation of breakfast.

She had just discovered that in the bustle of entering upon her new situation she had quite forgotten to order any bacon and eggs, or to speak to her young ladies about stocking the store cupboard.

"Dear! dear!" she said; "I must go out and get something in at once."

She put on her bonnet and was making her way to the door when she saw her young mistresses going into the sitting-room.

"Oh, dear!" she said; "they're up and they'll want their breakfast. I must explain."

She went into the sitting-room in a state of great distress.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said, "but we quite forgot about ordering things. We haven't any eggs and bacon."

"Oh, that will be all right," replied Miss Mabel, smiling sweetly. "Send the coffee in."

Mrs Twitterby went to the kitchen to give instructions and returned to see her young ladies.

Directly she entered the room she exclaimed, "Mercy on us!" She couldn't help it.

The breakfast-table was laid with dainty little dishes and flowers and choice fruit.

"My dear young ladies," she exclaimed, "where did these things come from?"

"Oh, we've been unpacking—we brought them with us," said Miss Jenny, laughing.

"Thank you, Mrs Twitterby, we can get on very nicely now," said Miss Mabel. "Oh, by-the-bye, be sure when we are out to see that the cat has plenty of milk, and that the canaries have plenty of seed, and look after the squirrel."

"Cat! Canaries! Squirrel!" exclaimed Mrs Twitterby—and then she stopped. There was the sweetest white Persian purring in front of the fire, a beautiful cage of canaries was hanging up in the window, and the liveliest squirrel she had ever seen in her life was enjoying himself in a revolving cage.

"They weren't there when I saw the room dusted," she said to herself as she retired. "These young ladies have the oddest way of doing things. I'm not quite sure that I like it."

After breakfast Mrs Twitterby came in to take orders for lunch and dinner.

"We sha'n't be at home much to-day," said Miss Mabel, "and we shall lunch and dine out."

"But about orders, miss, to the tradespeople?"

"Oh, don't trouble; we will send everything in."

"You'll excuse me, miss, but when I was with Lady Jenkins I was housekeeper, and I was engaged as housekeeper here."

"You want to do the ordering? Very well, Mrs Twitterby, order anything you like. We leave it to you."

"What about the motor?" whispered Jenny to her sister.

"I'll see to that at once," replied Mabel, under her voice.

She rose and took the squirrel's cage and hung it on a nail outside the window. "Squirrels like the sunshine," she said, smiling at Mrs Twitterby.

There was a ring at the bell, and presently Mary, the servant, entered.

"Please, ma'am, there's a young fellow

who says he's the shuffer, and I was to say your motor was ready."

Mrs Twitterby followed Mary out, intending to interview the chauffeur.

There was no one at the door. She went back into the sitting-room and found the young ladies gone. She ran to the window and saw them in elegant motoring costumes in a magnificent light-blue automobile, and in a moment they were whirled out of sight. She looked for the squirrel in its cage. There was no cage. There was no squirrel.

Mrs Twitterby fell back into an easy-chair. There was a worried look on her face.

"Perhaps they've taken that squirrel with them for more sunshine! I'm afraid this place won't suit me," she said. "These young ladies must be bachelor girls. They are much too up-to-date in their ways. I owe it to Lady Jenkins's memory not to be mixed up with such goings-on."

Suddenly her eyes lighted on an envelope lying on the table by a long silk purse. The

envelope was addressed to "Mrs Twitterby." She opened it and took out a letter.

"DEAR MRS TWITTERBY,—Order whatever you think necessary. But pay for everything—you will find the housekeeping money in the purse."

Mrs Twitterby opened the purse. It was full of sovereigns.

"Well, after all," she said, "they aren't mean and their manners are perfect, and I've got my own way with the housekeeping. I shall stay."

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Mr Jarboy had purchased a ready-made suit which fitted him badly. He rushed out of the tailor's shop with it, glad to be rid of his evening dress; but as soon as he began to move about he found that the coat was much too tight. It cut him under the arms, and when he heaved a sigh a button flew off the waistcoat. He got in a rage and excited, and the collar of his coat went up the back of his head and tilted his hat over his eyes.

The hat was too large for him. It was a windy March morning, and every time there was an extra gust the hat blew off and Jarboy had to rush after it as it went bowling along the street.

He found it very difficult to run in his tight new suit. He felt he should like to rip it open at all the seams with a penknife.

"I might as well be a trussed fowl," he exclaimed. "But there's no time to go back. I must get that confounded furniture and relieve my unhappy guests at Hampstead from their most painful position. I wonder if I am liable to them for damages for illegal detention?"

He jumped into a hansom as soon as he had caught up his hat for the third time, and told the cabman to put the glass down. That was to save his hat. The cabman let the glass down too quickly, and caught Jarboy on the nape of the neck. The hat went off, fell in the road, and the wheel went over it.

"Drive on!" shouted Jarboy, furiously. "I'm in a hurry. But pull the glass up."

The cabman drove so fast, and there was so much traffic, that he didn't hear Jarboy ask to have the glass pulled up. The unhappy money-lender did the journey with his head held down to the top of the folding-doors.

The passers-by laughed. "What will they do for an advertisement next, I wonder?" said a City man to the driver of an omnibus. He thought that Jarboy was an advertisement for the new hansom that didn't have a "guillotine" arrangement.

When the cab stopped at the furniture warehouse one of the assistants came out and released his employer.

Jarboy took the cabman's number and refused to pay him.

At this moment a magnificent blue motor-car dashed up, and two young ladies descended gracefully.

"The fairies!" groaned Jarboy. In his confusion he gave the cabman a sovereign in mistake for a shilling, and the man drove off.

"What time will that furniture be at Deptford?" said the Fairy Sunbeam.

"It will have to be got together and put on a van. Say three o'clock, miss," said Jarboy.

"Very well; that will release your guests in time for five-o'clock tea."

Jarboy groaned. "I promise faithfully I'll give the Trubys back every stick," he said. "Can't you let my guests come to their senses and get off home now?"

"No," said Daydream; "that is not our way of doing business. We never rely on the promises of wicked mortals."

"I'll try and get the job through by one."

"That is better. But you must send workmen over at once to put the place in thorough repair. It must be re-papered and re-decorated at once."

"You're very hard on me," groaned Jarboy.

"Not so hard as you were on them. Don't waste time in arguing; do as we have told you."

The fairies stepped back into the motor, and it was out of sight in a second.

Jarboy rushed into his warehouse. He set every man to work to get the Truby furniture loaded. He telephoned for painters and decorators to leave for Deptford at once, and gave the necessary instructions.

When, two hours later, he saw everything packed on a van, he thought he had better be on the safe side, so he had some new carpets put in for the Trubys to choose from, and a roll of linoleum, and a number of china ornaments, and a complete set of kitchen utensils, and a nice stock of bed-linen.

He didn't want to do these things, but a mysterious influence compelled him to. He made a wry face and felt his new suit get tighter and tighter at every fresh order he gave.

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Mr Jarboy, anxious to release his guests from their martyrdom at Morning View at the earliest possible moment, as soon as he

had seen the van start took the underground railway to Deptford Lower Road and went straight to the Trubys' house.

When he arrived he was surprised to find a dense crowd blocking up the little street. His astonishment at the huge assemblage ceased when he discovered what was going on.

His van was at the door and his men were unloading it with an alacrity that was almost pantomimic. They actually appeared to be dancing into the house with chests of drawers and bedsteads and tables on their backs. A dozen workmen were helping to paint the outside with a rapidity that was magical. In a few minutes all the bricks were re-pointed and the new paint shone brightly in the morning sun.

A carpenter was fixing window-boxes on the sills. He had hardly finished the last one before they were all filled with spring flowers.

On both sides of the street the windows were open, and every open window was packed with heads.

"Who's took the Trubys' place?" said Mrs Jones at No. 14 to Mrs Brown at No. 15.

"It must be one of them American millionaires as 'as brought his own workmen over," said Mrs Brown. "Our chaps couldn't work at that rate if they was paid a pound an hour."

The excitement was at its height, and the policeman on duty was thinking of summoning the tenant of the house for causing an obstruction, when the "toot-toot" of a motor was heard at the top of the street.

The crowd pressed back, and a magnificent light-blue automobile dashed up, and two charming young ladies stepped out of the elegant conveyance and entered the House of Mystery.

"The fairies!" exclaimed Jarboy. "Thank goodness they've come. They'll have to do something to get rid of the crowd or there'll be trouble."

The fairies had apparently taken in the situation at a glance. Sunbeam opened a

window on the first floor and addressed the crowd. "My good people," she said, "there is nothing to stare at."

The effect of these simple words was magical. The crowd instantly melted away. The neighbours closed their windows, and attended to their own business, and the policeman resumed his monotonous beat.

Mr Jarboy heaved a sigh of relief, and as the door was wide open he entered the premises which had so recently been the scene of one of his cruel evictions.

His foreman passed him in the little entrance-hall and touched his cap. "We've finished, sir," he said; "and it's about the quickest job we've ever done. I never thought it was in our fellows. I reckon they've done a week's work in half an hour. And there ain't one of 'em as has turned a hair."

"Pity they can't work like it always," said Mr Jarboy.

"It wouldn't pay, guv'nor," replied the foreman. "Besides, what would the trades unions say?"

The foreman went out and gathered his men together. They all leapt lightly into the van and lit their pipes, and as they drove off, the carpenter, who was a baritone, flooded the little side street with the haunting strains of "Bedelia."

Jarboy heard voices in the little sitting-room and knocked deferentially at the door. The events of the last twenty-four hours had left him very humble.

"Come in," said the Fairy Sunbeam, and Jarboy entered and stood hat in hand on the carpet.

"I hope you are satisfied, ladies?" he said.

"Quite," replied the Fairy Daydream. "But you had better go over the house and see if there is anything else you can suggest."

Jarboy went over his own property as a man in a dream. The house was so prettily arranged and so comfortable that he felt he shouldn't have minded living in it himself. He went into the little back-garden and thought it must be a garden in a picture book. There were primroses and crocuses

and daffodils, and a little glass-house against the wall, in which early summer blooms were rapidly approaching perfection, although it was only the beginning of March.

"It's a paradise," he groaned; "and I've got to make 'em a present of the lease."

He went back into the house and interviewed the fairies.

"Ladies," he said, "everything in the garden's lovely; the house is fit for an R.A. I've done everything you wanted. May my guests at Hampstead go home now?"

"Not yet," said the Fairy Daydream. "Will you kindly go into the kitchen and baste the fowl and see to the vegetables in the saucepans? The Trubys will be here directly and will want their dinner. There's an apple-pie in the oven—give an eye to that too, please."

Jarboy went into the kitchen speechless, but thinking a great deal.

He obeyed his orders, but as he basted the fowl his cheeks burned with indignation.

For a man in his position to be cooking the dinner of a working-class family was humiliating.

He was lifting the saucepan lid to see how the cabbage was boiling, when the Fairy Sunbeam came into the kitchen.

"Dish up and serve," she said; "the Trubys have arrived."

When Mr Jarboy carried the dishes into the little sitting-room and saw that the table was laid with a snowy cloth, and that everything on it was new and good—china, cutlery, cruet-stand, and glasses—he felt inclined to glare at the Trubys, who had already seated themselves.

He looked round for the fairies and could not see them.

"They've gone," he said to himself. "Now, I'll give these people a bit of my mind."

He was about to put the fowl down and tell Mrs Truby if she wanted the vegetables to get them herself, when a voice whispered in his ear,—

"We are here, but invisible."

Instantly Mr Jarboy became humble again.

"It's very good of you, Mr Jarboy," said Mr Truby, "to put our house in order."

"Yes; I'm very pleased to be able to do it."

He put the fowl in front of Mrs Truby, and turned back for the vegetables.

"Won't you sit down and join us?" said Mrs Truby, as she began to carve.

"No, thanks—I'll—I'll wait on you," said Jarboy.

It was a merry dinner—for the Trubys. The children did nothing but talk of the nice things in the house, and the little girl said she "loved" the new cruet-stand and should like to take it to bed with her.

When Jarboy brought in the apple-pie the children screamed with delight, and Tom smiled across the table at his wife.

After dinner the children went out into the pretty garden and picked a great bunch of primroses and daffodils. But wherever they picked a flower another grew at once in its place.

Mr Jarboy, after he had served the family, had spread a piece of newspaper on the end of the kitchen table and had made a hasty meal himself. He was washing up the plates and dishes when a voice said to him,—

"Give them the lease and you can go home."

"But I haven't had it prepared yet."

"Oh, yes; the conveyance of the house, legally made out and signed, is in your pocket."

"So it is," exclaimed Jarboy, as he drew it out.

He went into the sitting-room and apologised for disturbing Mr Truby, who was sitting by the fire holding his wife's hand. Then he presented him with the lease.

"Mr Truby," he said, "this house is yours for the remainder of my holding, which is ninety-seven years. After that I have no doubt you will be able to secure a renewal from the ground landlord."

Tom Truby took the lease, thanked Mr Jarboy, and put it in his pocket.

Mr Jarboy was about to take his departure when he felt compelled to say a few words more.

"I have treated you very badly, Mr Truby," he said. "You are entitled to damages. I shall allow you three pounds a week as long as I live, and remember you in my will."

Mr and Mrs Truby thanked Mr Jarboy, but they did not shake hands with him.

Jarboy felt this rather keenly, but he appeared not to notice it. He went back and was sweeping up the cinders in the kitchen grate when the fairies appeared. They seemed to have risen from the middle of the hearth.

"You can go now," they said, "but it is a long way—we will help you home."

There was a whirring sound like a clock running down, and the next moment Mr Jarboy found that he was at Morning View, and his wife and daughters were staring at

him and exclaiming, "Oh! wherever have you been?"

"I don't know," gasped Jarboy. "What about the ball? What about the guests?"

"Well, papa, everybody stayed till just now because they didn't like to leave without wishing you good-bye, but when it came to three o'clock in the afternoon they all left together."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Mr Jarboy. "They don't seem to have noticed what happened to them."

. . . . . .

At Scotland Yard the report of the Morning View Mystery disappeared *in transitu*, so no further notice was taken of it.

Mr Jarboy gave up business as a money-lender and retired into private life. He lives in a nobleman's mansion in the country, which he bought cheap. He has nailed a horseshoe over the front door to keep fairies away.

The Trubys lived happily ever afterwards.

The Fairies Sunbeam and Daydream re-

turned to the flat in Bloomsbury, and on the following day—

But how the fairies went to a police-court and to a convict gaol we have yet to learn.

CHAPTER V

TOM TWITTERBY

SUNBEAM and Daydream had been having a busy day in London. They had motored over to Canning Town, having heard that there was terrible poverty there, and had found quite a number of ragged little boys running about the streets without boots.

They met a poor little fellow, ragged and cold and barefooted. He was sobbing bitterly and rubbing his knuckles into his eyes.

"What is the matter, my little man?" said Sunbeam, kindly.

"Please, miss, we have had no brekfus', and farver gave me his weskit to pawn, and a big boy's took it and run away."

Sunbeam looked at the poor little mortal pityingly, and smiled at Daydream, who touched the boy with her umbrella.

He thought she was going to hit him,

and put his arm up to guard his face and shrank away.

But as no thrashing came he dropped his arm, and then all of a sudden he said "Crikey!"

He had a new pair of nice thick boots on, and the rips in his jacket and trousers had been mended. He had a thick slice of bread and jam in his hand, and his father's waistcoat was under his arm.

"Now run along home," said Sunbeam. "You need not pawn the waistcoat; I'm sure your father can do with it this cold weather."

"But there ain't nothing to eat in the place, mum."

"Oh, yes, there is. You'll find your mother has a lovely stew in the saucepan for dinner."

"Stew!" exclaimed the boy, giving an involuntary sniff, as if to inhale the appetising odour. "What, with meat in it?"

"Yes."

"Lor', mum, it ain't Sunday! And we

never has no meat 'cept then; and then it's 'pieces.' You're a-getting at me!"

"No; everybody has stew to-day! Smell!"

The boy gave another sniff, and this time he exclaimed "Golly!" There was no mistaking the savoury odour. It floated from every dingy little house and flooded the whole street.

"Lor'!" said the boy. "What's up? Here's boots growed sudden on my feet and everybody's got stew." When he had eaten his bread and jam and his hand was empty, he put it in his pocket and pulled out a piece of money.

"Halloa!" he exclaimed, looking suspiciously at the fairies. "I see your game —you're goin' to ask me to go into a shop and change this 'ere for you while you wait round the corner. It's a bad harf-a-crown."

"Oh, no," said Daydream, "it's quite good; go home and give it to your father. He'll tell you that it's all right."

The boy shook his head doubtfully, but he ran off home.

If there was stew he thought he had better hurry, or it would be all gone.

That evening the head master of the Board School on entering up his diary made the following remark:—

"A mysterious distribution of boots and stew took place this morning among the families of our poor unemployed. I have been unable to discover what benevolent agency has been at work amongst us. Shortly after twelve o'clock the women tell me they found their saucepans on the fire with meat and vegetables cooking in them —and all their little boys and girls, who had gone out bare-footed, came home to dinner with boots on."

Having relieved the pressing needs of Canning Town, at least for the day, the fairies re-entered their motor.

When they reached Mazenod Mansions they went upstairs to their flat with quite a keen appetite for lunch.

After lunch, wishing to speak to Mrs

Twitterby, they sent for her, and were grieved to see that their housekeeper's eyes were quite red.

"Why, what is the matter, Mrs Twitterby?" said Sunbeam, gently.

"Oh, miss, I'm in great trouble. I don't like telling you about it, as you might look down on me!"

"Come, come!" said Daydream, kindly. "You can confide in us."

"I am sure I can, my dear young ladies, for I know you've kind hearts, though, of course, to me, having been in elderly service, so to speak, all my life, your ways—speaking, if you'll pardon the liberty, motherly—do seem a bit odd at times."

"I daresay," replied Daydream, smiling. "But, you see, we are Colonials."

"Yes, miss; odd ways always runs in families—not that I ever heard anything against the Colonials. I have heard my poor husband say as the Twitterbys was always a bit strange, but there never was a thief among 'em, and that my nephew, Tom Twitterby—my husband's brother's

child—should do a thing like that, I'll never believe it—never! But I've just had a letter from him, written in prison."

The poor old soul broke down, and it was some time before the sisters could get a coherent narrative from her.

But at last they gathered that Tom Twitterby, a clerk to a firm of West End house agents, had been arrested on a charge of stealing a gold bangle and other jewellery. Tom had been checking an inventory in a furnished house in Regent's Park. He had naturally had access to all the rooms. The lady who was about to give up possession had accidentally left a gold bangle on the dressing-table. She went into the room about six o'clock, after Tom, who was working single-handed, had checked the items of the inventory and left, and discovered that the bangle was missing.

Thinking she might perhaps have put it back in her jewel-case and forgotten the circumstance, the lady went to the drawer in which the case was kept and found that she had omitted to lock it. She took the

jewel-case out, and then discovered to her horror that a clean sweep had been made of everything. Nearly a thousand pounds' worth of jewellery had disappeared.

Inquiry was at once made among the servants. They had all been downstairs at their tea while Tom was going over the room. The lady's-maid had seen Tom go in immediately after her mistress went downstairs. Then she had gone to her tea too, and all the servants had been together.

The lady's husband was away on the Continent, and having no one to advise her, she, in her excitement, told her maid to go at once to the young man's employers and see him, and ask him if he had noticed the bangle, and if anyone had come into the room. It never occurred to her to suspect the clerk of an old-established firm of house agents at Kensington. She thought the room must have been entered from the open window by an expert burglar.

The maid went off at once; and then the lady did what she should have done at first —sent for a policeman, who came and ex-

amined the premises and went off to fetch his inspector.

The lady's-maid went to the house agent's and asked to see the clerk who was making the inventory. It was then past seven o'clock, and everybody had left except a junior clerk, who was just about to take his departure.

The maid asked for the clerk who had been to Regent's Park, and was told it was Tom Twitterby. When could she see him? —would the young man give her his address?

The young man gave the required information, and the maid took a cab and drove at once to St Paul's Road, Camden Town, where Twitterby was living.

She asked for Mr Twitterby, and was shown into the parlour. Tom came down, was shocked to hear of the occurrence, and assured the maid that no one had entered the room while he was there, and declared he had seen no bangle on the dressing-table. He must have noticed it if it had been there, as some of the articles on the table were included in the inventory.

The maid left and went back and reported to her mistress and the police.

The next morning Tom went to the office, and the head of the firm cross-examined him closely. From the first it seems the police suspected that Tom was the thief, as there was no sign of any entrance having been effected from outside, and the servants all bore excellent characters.

While Tom was at the office a detective paid a visit to his house in St Paul's Road.

He was informed by the little servant that Mrs Twitterby was very ill and could see no one. She had been ill in bed for some days, and the doctor was rather anxious about her.

The detective said he was very sorry, but he had a search warrant and should have to search the house. He did his work as quietly as he could in the bedroom, but the shock to the poor wife was terrible. He found nothing and searched the other rooms.

In a corner of the sitting-room he saw a little escritoire. He opened it, and found

it contained a few letters and papers. He also found that there were four little drawers at the back of the escritoire. He opened them all. In the last he found, hidden under a little packet of receipted bills, the gold bangle.

The case was clear. Tom Twitterby had stolen the jewels, and had probably found a means of disposing of them the previous night, possibly through an accomplice. The bangle he had probably retained to give to his wife. The detective returned to the office and took Tom into custody.

That was the story the fairies gradually gathered from Mrs Twitterby, who assured them that, black as things might look for her nephew, she was certain he was innocent.

"It is a very strong case against him," said Daydream; "but we will see into it. If your nephew is innocent he shall not be punished."

Mrs Twitterby looked up through her tears and stared at her young mistresses.

"My dear young ladies," she said, "what

can you do? If they get my poor boy at the Old Bailey it is all over with him. You don't know our Old Bailey!"

"We shall see," said Daydream. "Now, don't worry. We will do all that mortals can do—and more."

. . . . . .

The prisoners who were to be taken to the police-court were formed up previously to being safely deposited in the police van, the official private omnibus which is popularly known as "Black Maria."

Tom Twitterby, pale and wretched, took his place in the vehicle with a few miserable companions in captivity, the door was banged to, the officer in charge jumped up on a step behind, the driver whipped up his horses, and the "'Bus of Bondage" rattled through the prison gates into the fresh air of the streets. Presently the constable in charge, looking through the grille, uttered an exclamation of surprise. A pretty girl, neatly dressed, and quite unlike the rest of the van's occupants, was in the compartment next the door.

"Halloa!" exclaimed the officer, "I don't remember your getting in."

"Don't you?" said the girl, smiling sweetly at the officer.

He consulted his list and could not find any prisoner upon it who answered the description of the pretty passenger.

"There must be some mistake," he said.

The girl fixed her eyes on his and the officer began to hum a dreamy coon song.

"That is a very pretty tune, but I want you to stop at St Paul's Road, Camden Town," said the young lady, giving the number.

"Of course, if you wish it, miss; but this is not an omnibus."

"Still, you will stop there?"

"Oh, certainly."

The officer called to the driver. "Stop at No. — St Paul's Road, Camden Town, Jack," he said; and presently, to the astonishment of the inhabitants, the Black Maria pulled up in front of Tom Twitterby's house.

The young lady opened the door of the

compartment in which Tom was standing. "Mr Twitterby," she said, "the police have kindly consented that you shall call and see your wife before you go to the court, as she is too ill to come there to see you."

"What!" exclaimed Tom. "Do you really mean—"

"Oh, yes. See, the door is open. Don't be afraid of giving your wife a shock. She expects you. My sister is with her and has prepared her."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" said Tom, imagining that the lady must be a police-court missionary.

The officer in charge had opened the door and Tom stepped out.

"Don't be long," said the officer. "We were rather late starting and the wood's greasy."

Tom went up the steps of his house like a man in a dream. The little servant opened the door and greeted him sympathetically.

"Missis is expecting you, sir," she said, and led the way to the invalid's room.

Tom, to his surprise, found his wife sitting

up in bed and smiling. A charming young lady, so like the one in the van that he knew at once it must be her sister, was sitting by the bedside.

She rose at Tom's entrance. "I'll leave you with your wife, Mr Twitterby," she said, "as you will have so little time together."

"Oh, Tom, dear," cried the invalid, "I'm so glad to see you. I thought it would have killed me when I heard of your arrest from the young lady you saw here!"

"Who is she, dear?"

"A Miss Jenny Smith. She says her sister, Miss Mabel Smith, is travelling with you in the van."

"Yes; they are police-court missionaries, I suppose. But how are you, dear?"

"Oh, much better since Miss Smith came yesterday afternoon. She tells me that she is quite certain you will get off."

"I am innocent, Ruth, dear, I swear it, though the bangle was found in my desk."

"Miss Smith knows that, Tom. She says she and her sister have been investigat-

ing the circumstances, and they are sure that they will be able to obtain your triumphant acquittal."

Tom heaved a sigh of relief.

"If there is justice in England they will," he said. "At anyrate, they must have great influence with the police. I never heard of a prison van stopping at a private house for a prisoner to see his wife before."

While Tom was being cheered and reassured by his wife, Daydream had gone outside and was sitting in the prison van chatting with her sister, much to the astonishment of the other inmates, who were all old hands and thought the end of the world had come.

"I'll take care of Mrs Twitterby," said Daydream.

"And I'll look after Tom," said Sunbeam. "After our visit last night to Regent's Park I shall not have any difficulty in getting him off."

"No; but, Sunbeam, dear, what shocking cowards mortals are! I've been laughing all the morning at the terror the servants

exhibited just because we stood by their bedsides in the middle of the night and asked them a few questions. In the old days mortals were never paralysed with fear when a fairy appeared to them."

"No; but you must remember they were used to it. It was quite an ordinary occurrence then. Fairies were the police of the days of old, and the judges as well, and assisted justice—they were what Scotland Yard and the Treasury and the Home Office are to-day."

"Yes; except that the fairies never made mistakes and punished the wrong people."

"Well, of course, mortals are not infallible; if they were they would not be mortals."

"I don't wish to disturb you young ladies," said the officer, touching his helmet, "but if the prisoner doesn't come soon we shall have to go without him. We are cutting it fine as it is."

"He shall come at once," said Daydream,

getting out. And at that moment Tom Twitterby, smiling and hopeful, came down the steps and tripped lightly into the van, which drove off to the police-court.

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When the van drove up to the prisoners' entrance of the court the officer in charge opened the door to assist the pretty young lady out, and gave a long, low whistle of amazement.

There was no young lady there.

"Jack," he shouted to the driver, "did we stop on the way here for a prisoner to get out?"

"Who are you getting at?" replied the driver, with a grin. "It isn't the first of April, is it?"

Then the officer went hot and cold all over, and determined to see the doctor at once.

"It must have been my sunstroke in India," he murmured to himself.

When Tom Twitterby was placed in the dock a pretty young lady came into court. She looked at the magistrate, who caught

her glance, gave a little start, and then invited her to take a seat on the Bench.

"I didn't know her from Adam," he explained afterwards to his wife; "but I felt I must do it, and I did."

Evidence of the robbery was given in the ordinary way. The police had arranged only to produce evidence sufficient to justify a remand. But the young lady on the Bench looked at the magistrate, and he gave another little start and said he should like to hear a little more.

The solicitor for the prosecution hesitated for a moment, fidgeted with his papers, and then, in a loud, clear voice, said, "Call Florence Wilson."

The lady's-maid was at once ushered into the witness-box. At the same moment Mr Horace Higgs, a well-known solicitor, entered the court.

"I have only just been retained for the defence," he said.

"Then you apply for a remand?" said the magistrate.

"Oh, no; I am quite prepared to go on now."

There was quite a sensation in court at the entrance of Mr Horace Higgs, for he was considered one of the cleverest lawyers practising in the Criminal Courts.

He had only just been instructed by a young lady who had called at his office, but the young lady had given him some very remarkable information, and when he jumped into a cab to drive to the court he felt personally interested in the case.

The lady's-maid was a tall, good-looking woman of about eight-and-twenty. Her face was pale and her hand trembled as she took the oath. Her mistress, who was in court, was most surprised at her maid's agitation. The girl had been greatly upset by the robbery, and had had a terrible dream in the night which had prevented her getting any sleep afterwards.

Florence Wilson told her story in answer to the questions of the solicitor for the prosecution. Then Mr Horace Higgs rose to cross-examine.

"You are lady's-maid to the prosecutrix," he said, "and so you had access to the room from which the jewels were stolen?"

"Yes."

"On the night of the robbery you went to the prisoner's house? You were shown into the room in which the bangle was found?"

"Yes."

"And you were left there alone?"

"Yes."

"When, that same evening, you brought the other jewels away with you, what did you do with them?"

Amid the most intense excitement the solicitor for the prosecution leapt to his feet. "Your worship," he exclaimed, "in all my experience I have never heard such a question addressed to a witness. I—"

He was interrupted by a woman's scream. The lady's-maid had glanced for the first time at the Bench and caught sight of the Fairy Sunbeam.

With a cry of terror she flung her arms up.

"It was you!" she shrieked—"you who

came in the night and wrung my secret from me! I confess. I stole the jewels and conceived the plan of going to the clerk's house in the hope of being able to conceal the bangle in his room and get the robbery fixed on him, that I might not be suspected. I was going to send the police an anonymous letter, telling them to search the escritoire, but they did it of their own accord."

The woman staggered from the box and was immediately arrested.

Everyone glanced in the direction of the Bench, but the young lady had disappeared. The magistrate left his seat and, vaulting over the partition into the dock, shook the prisoner warmly by the hand and gave him his card. "My wife's 'at home' day is the first Thursday," he said. "We shall be delighted to see you."

Then everybody in court stood up and gave three cheers.

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When Tom Twitterby returned radiant and happy to his home he found his wife

at the front door ready to welcome him. In the parlour Tom's employer was waiting to congratulate him and to inform him that his salary was doubled.

When Mrs Twitterby, about five o'clock that afternoon, went into the sitting-room of Mazenod Mansions she found the young ladies there. They were playing patience.

They looked up and smiled. "Your nephew left the court without a stain on his character, Mrs Twitterby," said Miss Mabel. "You had better have the evening off and go and spend it with Tom and his wife."

The fairies finished their game of patience, made a light dinner, and sat for a few minutes by the fire.

"Without us," said Daydream, "I am afraid poor Tom Twitterby might have been convicted and branded as a thief all his life."

"Yes," replied Sunbeam, "I have no doubt there are plenty of innocent men and women in gaol."

"Let us go to one and see," said Daydream.

. . . . . .

When Mrs Twitterby returned to the flat she found a memorandum on the table from her young mistresses:—

"We shall probably be away for a couple of days."

"They've left no address for letters," said Mrs Twitterby. "But, there, they never have any, which is one of the things I can't make out."

If the young ladies had left an address, their "motherly" old housekeeper might have been very anxious about them.

They were on their way to a famous convict prison.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONVICTS

It was close upon midnight as Sunbeam and Daydream made their way across the wild, desolate moor in the centre of which the great convict prison was situated.

"What a lonely place!" said Daydream. "If we weren't fairies I suppose we should be frightened."

Just then the moon came out from behind the clouds, and at the same moment two men came out from behind some bushes.

"Convicts!" exclaimed Sunbeam, as she caught sight of the broad arrows on the men's jackets and knickerbockers.

"No, miss," said one of the men, stepping forward and doffing his cap politely; "no doubt we do look uncommonly like it, but we belong to a football club, 'The Broad Arrows,' and this is the costume we always play our matches in."

"Indeed," said Daydream, smiling; "but it is rather late for football. Isn't it time you changed? Two convicts escaped this afternoon from the prison and you might be mistaken for them."

The convicts looked at each other uneasily.

"The names of the men who escaped are Brackett and Jones," said Sunbeam, "and you answer their description perfectly."

"You know that?" exclaimed the two men almost together.

"We know everything," replied Sunbeam, "but you need not be afraid of us."

"Don't stand palavering with 'em, Jack," exclaimed Jones, angrily. "Let's make 'em shell out and get on."

The man stepped towards the girls threateningly.

"Hold hard, Bill," exclaimed his companion, seizing him by the arm; "if the ladies like to help us they can but I'm hanged if I'm going to see them ill-treated."

"Thank you, Mr Brackett," said Sun-

beam. "We are quite willing to help you. But, first of all, why have you run away?"

"We were badly used, miss. Bill here, he's a bit rough, but you must forgive him. We've been persecuted, miss, and unjustly treated."

"Poor fellows," said Daydream to her sister. "It must be very terrible to be kept in a prison for years. Let us help them."

"Yes, I think we may. Come—if we help you, will you try to lead honest lives?"

"I will try my utmost," said Brackett. "I have a young wife and two dear little children in London. They are with my poor mother, whose heart was broken by my disgrace. I want to see them again, and then I'll go away, anywhere where I can earn an honest living."

"And you?"

Daydream turned to Jones, who was looking very down-hearted.

"I ain't been brought up to nothing but burglary," he muttered. "I don't know

of anything else as I could do for a living."

"Well, you might be a policeman."

Jones laughed. "That's a good idea. Crikey! I should look well reporting myself at the Convict Supervision Department as a bobby, shouldn't I?"

"I'll arrange that," said Sunbeam. "You will join the Force as soon as you get to London, and you will not be recognised as an ex-convict."

Then she turned to Brackett. "You will take passages for yourself, your family, and your mother to Canada, and out there you will work hard and prosper."

"But where's the money to come from?"

"You will find it waiting for you in a registered letter at your mother's house."

"That's a very pleasant prospect, miss," said Brackett, "but we've got to get to London first, and we can't get there in these clothes."

"In what clothes?" asked Sunbeam.

"Why, what we've got on, miss. Halloa!"

This exclamation of astonishment came from Brackett as he caught sight of his companion.

Jones wore the complete costume of a chauffeur in a nobleman's family.

Jones turned hurriedly at his comrade's exclamation, and then he too exclaimed, "Halloa!"

Brackett wore a motoring cap and a motor mask, and his form was swathed in a magnificent fur overcoat.

Before the convicts could find further words in which to express their feelings, a light-blue motor-car was throbbing close beside them.

"Get in," said the fairies, and the convicts obeyed.

"Now, away you go to London."

"I don't know how to thank you," gasped Brackett.

"You will both thank us by leading better lives."

"We will!" exclaimed the convicts, fervently.

"And be good enough to telephone us

to-morrow morning at 9.30, to let us know you are safe."

"Yes, miss—where to?"

"To the gaol you have just left. You will find the number in the telephone-book. Good-bye."

Before the bewildered convicts could utter another word the motor had started, and was flying towards London at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

Sunbeam and Daydream looked after the car for a moment, then made their way rapidly across the moor to the prison.

. . . . . .

A warder on night duty, pacing one of the corridors of the great convict prison, suddenly reeled back against a cell door and dropped his keys.

Coming slowly along the corridor he saw two young ladies.

He stood, or rather leant, transfixed, and saw the figures pass into the cell of a convict named Gilbert Clayton, a young man undergoing five years' penal servitude for robbery with violence in a train.

An elderly banker had been found insensible in a first-class compartment one evening when an express train from Portsmouth stopped at Vauxhall, the ticket-collecting station before running into Waterloo.

Some passengers got out, among them Gilbert Clayton, who gave up a third-class ticket.

The ticket-collector remembered the fact because Clayton, who appeared confused, gave up the return half from Waterloo to Portsmouth.

When the insensible passenger was discovered it was found that he had been struck on the head with some heavy instrument, and there were signs that a severe struggle had taken place and that the object of the assault had been robbery.

Fortunately the injury was not serious, and the next day Mr Melville, the injured man, was able to make a statement. He said that a young man got into the compartment at Guildford, and that when the train was running at full speed between

Guildford and Vauxhall this young man suddenly seized him by the throat and struck him with a bludgeon which he drew from his overcoat pocket. His object was evidently robbery, for a pocket-book containing bank-notes—of which fortunately he had the numbers—his watch and chain, and a valuable pearl scarf-pin had disappeared.

He described his fellow-passenger, who had evidently alighted at Vauxhall and got quickly away before the discovery. The description being reported to the ticket-collector, he at once remembered the young man who gave up the wrong half of his ticket and appeared agitated and confused.

The publication of the circumstances in the Press brought forward other evidence. A publican in the neighbourhood of Vauxhall had served a young man answering this description with sixpennyworth of neat brandy. The young man gulped it down and left hurriedly. He appeared agitated. The description the publican gave tallied with that given by the collector. A de-

tective-inspector took charge of the case, made various inquiries, and some days later arrested Gilbert Clayton in a room he had taken in Vauxhall Bridge Road.

The forward half of a ticket from Portsmouth to Waterloo was found when the place was searched.

When he was arrested the young man explained that he had come to London to try and sell some short stories he had written. He had been a clerk in a Portsmouth office, had lost his berth through slackness of trade, and having a young wife had been anxious to turn his literary talent to account. He admitted that at the time he left Portsmouth he was in debt, and in urgent need of money.

The police were certain that they had got the right man. Some witnesses deposed to seeing the accused at Vauxhall and that he appeared agitated and nervous. The victim of the attack, as soon as he was well enough to be confronted with the prisoner, said that "to the best of his belief" this was his assailant, but he would not swear.

At the Old Bailey the officer in charge of the case produced an important witness. Late on the night of the crime, and before the details were known to the public, a young man had gone into a tobacconist's shop in the Strand, purchased ten shillings' worth of cigars, and tendered a five-pound note in payment. He had been requested to endorse the note with his name and address, and had written "George Ellis," and an address in Westminster on the back.

The tobacconist said he had no doubt the prisoner was the man. He had picked him out from twenty others at the police station after he had given information. An expert in handwriting called by the Treasury said that the handwriting on the note was undoubtedly that of the prisoner disguised. He had compared the endorsement with handwriting which was admittedly the prisoner's, and had made a report to the Treasury.

The counsel for the defence made an earnest appeal, but could call no witnesses

to prove that his client was *not* in the compartment in which the crime was committed. The prisoner made a passionate assertion of his innocence, but the jury found him guilty and he was sentenced to a long term of penal servitude.

. . . . . .

It was into the cell of Gilbert Clayton that the astonished warder saw two young ladies pass at midnight, and as the cell door was securely fastened he made up his mind that he had either seen two ghosts, or he was suffering from some form of mental disturbance.

He peered through the observation hole and saw the convict lying asleep.

Sunbeam and Daydream, who were in the cell, had made themselves invisible.

"Poor fellow!" said Daydream. "There is no doubt that he is innocent. And he has petitioned the Home Office and no notice has been taken. Let us make him happy."

Sunbeam touched the convict's eyelids gently, and he dreamed he was back again

in the world, a free man, with his wife sitting smiling beside him.

"You have proved your innocence at last," said his wife.

"Yes, dear, but once I thought I never should. When the convict who worked with me and knew what I was in for told me that after my conviction all the notes in the case had been passed through a well-known fence, and that the man who brought them to him was my double, I put the information in the form of a petition and sent it to the Home Office, but I only got a curt reply through the governor saying that my petition for an investigation was refused.

"All the petitions I sent afterwards were ignored. But now I am free and with you, dear. Justice has been done at last."

. . . . . .

The deputy-governor of the convict gaol was at breakfast in his room in the officers' quarters. He was not in a particularly amiable mood. Two convicts had escaped

the previous day, and all efforts to capture them had been fruitless.

There was a knock at the door and the head warder entered.

"Well, Parsons," said the deputy-governor, looking up eagerly at the official, "have they got Brackett and Jones yet?"

"No, sir, but there's news of 'em. Two young ladies have called. They say they met the convicts on the moor last night, and have some important information to give you."

"Ah! that is something. Show them in."

The head warder went out and returned directly, ushering in two remarkably pretty girls.

The deputy-governor rose and received them with the greatest courtesy. He was susceptible to the charms of the fair sex, and he saw at a glance that his visitors were young ladies of good social position.

The deputy-governor bowed.

"I understand," he said, "that you have

information concerning two escaped convicts."

"Yes; we met them last night on the moor, and we were quite interested in them."

"Interested? I should have thought you would have been terrified. I suppose they did not confide their plans to you?"

"Yes; they told us they were going to London."

At that moment the telephone bell rang, and the deputy-governor went to the instrument and said, "Who are you?"

Then, with an expression of astonishment, he turned to his visitors. "Someone is asking for Miss Smith on the telephone," he said.

"Oh, that is quite right," said Sunbeam, jumping up and going to the instrument. "The poor fellows promised to ring us up in the morning and let us know how they were getting on."

The deputy-governor dropped into an armchair. He had lost the power of speech.

"Are you Brackett?" said Sunbeam, at the telephone.

"Yes, miss. We got to London all right. I've seen my wife and my mother, and we're off to Canada on Saturday."

"That's right; where is Jones?"

"I'm here, miss," said a voice at the other end of the wire.

"And how have you got on?"

"Splendidly, miss. I joined the Force half an hour ago, and I'm to have my uniform this afternoon."

"That's right, Jones."

"Yes, it's all right for me, but won't some of my old pals stare when they see me rigged up as a bobby! They'll keep off my beat; I know a bit too much for 'em."

"Yes," said Sunbeam, smiling. "I'm sure you will make a splendid policeman. Good-bye."

Sunbeam rang off, and the deputy-governor with a great effort found his voice.

"Do you know," he exclaimed, "that you are liable to be arrested? I believe you've been assisting these men to escape!"

"We have," said Daydream, quite sweetly. "Their time was up, and they ought not to have been detained."

"They forfeited the remission—"

"They were unjustly accused of breaches of prison discipline."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the deputy-governor, "who are you? How do you know these things?"

"We are fairies," replied Daydream.

"Fairies! Nonsense! You must be lunatics."

"Oh, no," said Daydream, coming close to the chair in which the deputy-governor was still seated, and looking into his eyes. "We are fairies, and you are going to obey us."

The deputy-governor blinked. Daydream's gaze was remarkably penetrating.

"Certainly," he said—"of course—anything you young ladies desire."

"Well, first of all, you will give the convicts a holiday."

"Yes—but I—er—don't see quite how it is to be managed."

"Oh, leave that to us," said Daydream. "We'll take all the trouble off your hands."

She waved her umbrella, then led the deputy-governor to the window. He threw up his hands with horror. The convicts were all out in the grounds. Some of them were strolling about smoking pipes and reading newspapers. Others had already started a cricket match.

"Luncheon will be provided in a big marquee," said Sunbeam, laying her hand on the deputy-governor's shoulder, "and you will preside and make a nice little speech."

"Certainly—certainly! I'll write one out and study it. I suppose it would be rather a graceful thing if, after luncheon, I gave every man a cigar?"

"I think they would like it. But for the afternoon let there be athletic sports for prizes, and in the evening a ball."

"A ball—ha, ha!—that's funny! Fancy a lot of convicts dancing with each other!"

"Oh, but they need not dance with each other. I have arranged for their wives and

sweethearts to come down by special train, so there will be plenty of partners for the poor men."

"Wives and sweethearts!" cried the deputy-governor, aghast. "What will the Prison Commissioners say?"

"Nothing. They will not be troubled with the details. Do not be afraid. Perfect order will be maintained—we have arranged for that. You will open the ball with the wife of the convict who has been longest with you."

'And what will you do?" groaned the deputy-governor.

"Oh, we are going to London; we must be at the Home Office this afternoon."

"The Home Office?"

"Yes; we are going to insist upon Gilbert Clayton being released. It is most improper for a British subject to be kept in prison after his innocence has been proved."

The deputy-governor shrugged his shoulders. "You seem to be able to do what you like with me," he said; "but if you can move the Home Office—"

There was a knock at the door, and the head warder entered.

"If you please, sir," he said, "the convicts' compliments, and they have subscribed for a little testimonial to you. It's a motor-car, sir. There it is in the grounds —just by the shed."

The deputy-governor looked out of the window and saw a magnificent motor-car.

"For me!" he exclaimed, "and from the men! But where did they get the money from to pay for a superb machine like that?"

The fairies smiled at each other. When the deputy-governor tore himself from the window they had disappeared.

. . . . . .

The assistant-secretary was seated in his private room at the Home Office, and he was very much annoyed.

"The Home Office is not a Court of Criminal Appeal," he exclaimed, as he put a blue pencil "Nil" on the twenty-third petition that had been placed before him asking for the reinvestigation of a case.

"About the case of Gilbert Clayton?" said a sweet voice.

The assistant-secretary started and looked up.

Two charming young ladies were standing by his desk.

"I beg your pardon," stammered the official. "Did you send your cards up?"

"Oh, no," said Sunbeam. "We thought it would save time if we came ourselves."

"May I inquire who you are and what interest you have in the case you mention?"

"We are two young Englishwomen, and we do not like an Englishman to be refused justice by English officials."

"I don't know how you got into my room," replied the assistant-secretary, "but this is a most unofficial proceeding. If you will kindly put anything you have to say in the form of a petition and forward it in the usual way—"

"It will share the fate of all the other petitions you receive here," replied Daydream, sternly.

"Gilbert Clayton was convicted after a most patient trial; the evidence of the witnesses was overwhelming; the evidence of the handwriting expert—"

"Witnesses may be mistaken."

"But the jury found Clayton guilty."

"They did not know the facts. The notes were disposed of after Clayton was in prison, and by a man who is his absolute double."

"My dear young lady, that is the sort of trash the newspapers print. Our police system, our prison system, our system of criminal procedure, and—if I may say so—our system at the Home Office, are all absolutely perfect. The convict Clayton is a guilty man."

"We shall see," exclaimed Daydream, as she waved her umbrella.

The next moment a high official from Scotland Yard burst into the room. The fairies instantly made themselves invisible.

"I say," said the gentleman from Scotland Yard, "a most extraordinary thing has happened. A policeman has arrested

a man and brought us absolute proof that he was the real author of the crime for which Gilbert Clayton was sentenced."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the assistant-secretary.

"It is a fact. The officer—Police-constable Jones, who is apparently new to the Force—ran a man in, and informed his inspector that this person had committed the Portsmouth train outrage, stolen the notes, and passed them to a well-known fence. The fence has been arrested and has confessed. The man in custody is the living image of Gilbert Clayton."

"Then the statements in Clayton's petitions are true?"

"Absolutely; he must be released at once."

"It's a confounded nuisance," said the assistant-secretary. "There will be the usual hullabaloo in the Press. Convicts have no business to be innocent. By being so they destroy public confidence in—But where are those young ladies?"

"My dear fellow," said the gentleman

from Scotland Yard, "I did not come here to talk about young ladies. I've told you what has happened, and you must see the Home Secretary at once and get a free pardon for Gilbert Clayton."

. . . . . .

When Sunbeam and Daydream returned to the great convict prison the gaiety was at its height. All the cells were prettily decorated with flowers, and in the largest room a ball was in progress.

Gilbert Clayton's wife had been telegraphed for and had arrived, and they were sitting together holding each other's hands in a quiet corner of the room and watching the dancers.

It had been arranged that Sir Roger de Coverley should precede supper. The convicts had just taken their partners, and the deputy-governor had come up smiling to Mrs Clayton to know if he "might have the pleasure," when the two fairies suddenly appeared in the middle of the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Sunbeam, "I have the pleasure to inform you that

Mr Gilbert Clayton's innocence has been proved."

At that moment a Government messenger rode into the room on a motor-cycle, dashed up to the deputy-governor, and handed him an official envelope. The deputy-governor tore it open and then, leaping on the refreshment buffet, exclaimed, "A free pardon for Gilbert Clayton!"

A moment afterwards Mr and Mrs Clayton were being whirled along the road to Portsmouth in a light-blue motor-car.

The next morning nobody in the prison remembered anything about the *fete*, but everybody lay rather late.

At the Home Office the assistant-secretary sat with a pile of petitions around him. He was studying them all carefully with a view to making inquiries into each case.

And Sunbeam and Daydream sat smiling at Mrs Twitterby over the breakfast-table at Mazenod Mansions.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE LADIES' CLUB

"JOE, dear," said Mrs Ehrenstein to her husband, "I've asked two charming girls to dine with us to-night at the Carlton."

Mr Joseph Ehrenstein looked up from the *Times* and said "Oh!"

"I met them at the club yesterday. Somebody introduced us. I really forget who it was—but they were so sweet that I took quite a fancy to them. They are Colonials, it seems, and visiting London for the first time."

"Ah," said Mr Ehrenstein.

"So, as they have evidently seen very little of London, and have no friends here, I offered to chaperon them to the Carlton. I hope you have no engagements this evening, Joe?"

"No," said Mr Ehrenstein.

"Then that's settled, dear. We dine at

8.30, and we are to meet them in the Palm Room."

Mrs Ehrenstein, satisfied that she had secured her husband for the evening, left him to finish his *Times* in peace.

The Ehrensteins were very rich people indeed. Joseph Aaron Stein had started life humbly, had made money early, and a fortune before he was forty. He had married also early, the best little woman in the world, of origin as humble as himself but with social ambitions. They had emigrated to America soon after their marriage, and there Mr Joseph Aaron Stein had made his pile.

So as soon as they began to find time for spending some of the money they had made, Mr Aaron Stein changed his name to Ehrenstein, and it was as Mr and Mrs Ehrenstein that they came to London and took a house in Mayfair.

"Joe" Ehrenstein did not want grandeur and he did not want gaiety, but, as his one desire in life was to make "the best little woman in the world" happy, he let her

have all the grandeur and gaiety she wanted.

They did not aspire to the Smart Set or the "best houses." They were content to be highly esteemed among the wealthy middle-class people who accepted their hospitality and welcomed them in return. And in their quiet, unostentatious way they did many noble acts of practical charity.

Sunbeam and Daydream, walking about the West End in search of adventure one afternoon, had come upon a ladies' club, and had decided to go in and see what it was like.

They had no difficulty, being fairies, in passing the hall porter, and when they sat down by one of the big windows nobody looked upon them as strangers whose presence ought to be challenged.

They saw Mrs Ehrenstein buried in the pages of an illustrated monthly, liked her appearance, and at once willed that she should come and speak to them.

In a few minutes they were chatting affably with their new acquaintance, and had invited her to come and see them at

their flat. Mrs Ehrenstein promised that she would, but insisted that they must first dine with her. "It will be dull for you at my house," she said. "You see, we've no children, and Joe and I like to dine out as often as we can—we see people, and it is livelier. So if you will dine with us to-morrow at the Carlton at half-past eight we shall be awfully pleased."

That is how the invitation was given. The fairies accepted it gladly. They wanted to see some of the fashionable restaurants of London, and even fairies cannot very well dine publicly alone, especially when they are young and pretty, as, of course, most fairies are.

Before Mrs Ehrenstein left the club she had given her new friends many interesting particulars in her good-natured, gossipy way concerning some of the members who were present.

She had pointed out a tall, willowy woman of about thirty-five, with big blue eyes and corn-coloured hair, as the authoress of the Society novel which had taken

London by storm on account of its interesting and somewhat scandalous revelations.

"That, my dears," she said, in a discreet whisper, "is Mrs Gaston Grey. She writes under the name of 'Zut.' Nobody knows what it means, but it is supposed to be awfully clever, and quite a number of women have given it to their dogs—especially to black Poms. It sounds so like 'soot,' you know."

"And who are they?" said Daydream, as they passed through the smoking-room and saw two fashionably-dressed young women standing by the fireplace in a manly way, and drawling out a conversation between the whiffs of tobacco from their cigarettes; "are they what are called bachelor girls?"

"Oh, no, my dear," replied Mrs Ehrenstein, smiling. "They are both married. One is a Mrs Jack Gillingham and the other Mrs Morris—Molly Morris she is generally called in the club."

"And who is that middle-aged lady in the corner reading the *Sportsman?*"

Mrs Ehrenstein laughed. "She wouldn't like to hear herself called middle-aged, but, of course, she is, as you can see for yourselves, though she makes up so tremendously. That is the Countess de Something or other, I always forget her name, it is something unpronounceable with 'g's' and 'z's' in it, and is supposed to be Polish. We always speak of her in the club as the Countess. She is a great bridge player, and, between ourselves, my dear, she makes a book."

"What, another lady writer?"

"No—of course, you don't understand, being new to our English ways. She takes money from any of our members who want to back horses—and I'm sorry to say a good many do—and lays the odds at—er—starting price, I think you call it. She always pays what she loses. I have heard it whispered that she is really only an agent for a West-End bookmaker, and does his business in the club. But I don't care for these people, my dears, and so of course I really don't know if all that is said is true—

I daresay not. A good deal of our club tittle-tattle isn't."

"Really!" said Sunbeam, with a little sigh; "I had no idea that your ladies' clubs were so—what shall I say?"

"'Up-to-date,' my dear, that is the word, I think. But you must not judge all women's clubs by this. We are quite a worldly set here. There are women's clubs where the members are serious—very serious, indeed."

"I always thought a woman's club *was* serious. I thought the members met for study or social work, or—"

Mrs Ehrenstein laughed.

"A sort of superior mothers' meeting? No, there are very few clubs of that sort in the West End, but in the South of London and at the East End there are women's clubs that render good service to the women workers and help forward all the movements for removing the disabilities of the sex. But there is nothing of that sort here. We are a club for women of the world. We play bridge and smoke and talk scandal and

invite our male friends to our luncheons and dinners—and all that sort of thing. There are no men here now, because it is between times, but you will see plenty at the hour of 'tea.'"

"Thank you," said Sunbeam; "it is all very interesting, isn't it, Jenny?"

"Yes," said Jenny, "most interesting—and useful."

"By-the-bye," said Mrs Ehrenstein, looking, for her, rather keenly at the girls, "how is it you are members? If you have no friends in London, how did you manage to get put up?"

"Oh," said Sunbeam, "we are rather well known in the Colonies, and we have been made honorary members."

"I see," said Mrs Ehrenstein; "but I really must be going. I've promised Joe—that's my husband, you know—to take him out this afternoon. The dear old thing won't come here. He absolutely refuses to put his foot inside the place. He has rather old-fashioned notions about women."

"Do any husbands come here with their wives?" said Sunbeam.

"Oh, yes, occasionally, but not often. The committee do not encourage that sort of thing. Well, good-bye, and remember we shall expect you to-morrow—8.30 sharp—the Carlton."

Mrs Ehrenstein shook hands heartily with her two young Colonial friends and whisked herself off.

"That is a nice little woman," said Sunbeam, "and I am glad we met her; but I think, Daydream dear, we, as good fairies, might try and give some of the other members of this club a little moral lesson."

. . . . . .

Mrs Gaston Grey, the famous "Zut," was being made much of by a party of admiring club women.

"How wonderfully you have hit off the Duchess of Dartford, my dear Zut," said one. "Everybody recognised the character. How closely you must have studied her. Of course you know her intimately?"

"I did," said Zut, carelessly. "We were

what I suppose you would call bosom friends at one time, but after the incident that I put in my book, and that I need not say I toned down, of course I dropped her."

"And where did you drop her from?" said a stout, red-faced, but still aristocratic-looking woman, whom nobody remembered ever to have seen in the club before. "I hope it was not from the window of the top room in which your husband keeps the unredeemed pledges."

"What do you mean, madam?" exclaimed the great Society novelist, turning angrily upon the stranger.

"Her husband—unredeemed pledges!" murmured the astonished members.

"Oh, yes," the red-faced lady went on, quietly. "Don't you know that Mr Gaston Grey—there is no Gaston on his tickets—is a successful pawnbroker who has shops in various parts of London? Of course, a pawnbroker is a very useful, a very necessary, and often a very respectable member of the community, but I don't think his wife ought to write stories about the ladies

who occasionally entrust him with their jewellery as security for a loan."

The Society novelist had gone rather pale, but she faced her adversary bravely.

"You are making a mistake in your pawnbroker, madam," she said. "It is not usual for such remarks to be made in a club, though doubtless you have never been in one before, and may plead ignorance. But I must ask for your name, that I may request the committee to find out how you got into a club intended for ladies."

"My name is at your service," replied the stranger; "but you ought to know it, seeing that we were bosom friends. I am the Duchess of Dartford."

The Society novelist gave a little gasp, and exclaimed, "You shall hear from my solicitors."

At that moment she caught sight of herself in a mirror. The three pompons in her chic little hat had turned to three brass balls, and where a little jewelled watch had been attached to the lappet of her smart jacket was a pawn-ticket, with the words

"G. Grey, Pawnbroker," printed upon it. The Society novelist burst into tears and rushed from the room.

The ladies who had been witnesses of this strange scene tittered.

"Fancy," said one, "her husband is a pawnbroker, and really by her books you would think she had the *entree* of all the best houses in London."

When they turned to compliment the Duchess on the result of her little verbal duel with "Zut" there was no Duchess to be seen. The only strangers present were two pretty girls, one of whom sat by the window, a neatly-folded umbrella resting by her chair. This young lady was quietly turning over the pages of *The Strand Magazine*, and had apparently taken no interest in the little Society drama that had just been enacted.

. . . . . .

Mrs Jack Gillingham and Molly Morris were sitting in the smoking-room, which had filled up rapidly with lady members and their gentlemen guests.

"Molly," said Mrs Jack, "you are nearer the bell than I am, you might ring it. I want a brandy-and-soda."

Now, Mrs Gillingham did not want a brandy-and-soda — she would have preferred a cup of tea—but she had the reputation of being an up-to-date club woman, and there were a number of smart people in the room upon whom she was anxious to make an impression.

And she did, but not in the way she had intended.

For, suddenly, outside the door there was heard the sound of a baby crying, and a look of blank astonishment came into the faces of the women, while the men tittered audibly.

And before anyone could go out to discover the meaning of these extraordinary sounds a pretty little girl of six came running into the room, and throwing her arms round the neck of Mrs Jack Gillingham exclaimed, "Oh, mummy, the twins were so naughty in the park, nurse has brought them to you to see if you can make them be good."

And into the smoking-room came a comely English nursemaid wheeling a baby carriage in which a pair of plump infants were seated screaming at the top of their voices.

"I can't think what's come to them, ma'am," said the nurse, apologetically; "they've kicked their shoes off, they've thrown their feeding-bottles on to the pavement and smashed them, and they shrieked so in Piccadilly that the old gentlemen in the clubs came to the windows and shook their fists at them. So I thought I would bring them here and see if you could hush them off for me."

Then, before Mrs Jack could protest, the nurse had lifted the twins out and placed them scientifically in their mother's loving arms.

Mrs Jack Gillingham had been too horror-stricken to remove the cigarette from her lips, and at that minute the waiter entered and, popping off the cork, said, "Brandy-and-soda for you, ma'am."

That was the last straw. The women in

the smoking-room giggled and the men roared.

Mrs Jack Gillingham sat the picture of helpless mortification, with her babies in her arms, and Molly Morris, quitting the side of her friend, hurriedly made for another part of the room. She was afraid she might be asked to take one of the twins.

But Molly Morris had only taken three paces from the point of danger when the door of the smoking-room opened again and an excited stout, elderly female with her bonnet on the back of her head entered dragging a pretty little boy of seven in a sailor suit after her by the hand.

The boy was screaming with passion and kicking his custodian's legs with all his might.

The stout, elderly person made straight for Mrs Morris.

"What is the meaning of this, Johnson?" exclaimed that lady, her eyes positively blazing with indignation.

"Meaning, ma'am—I'll tell you the meaning and in plain English. If you

can't stop at home and look after your family, you'd better leave somebody as can. I'm not going to have this imp of mischief in my kitchen assaulting and a-battering me. The owdacious little wretch ackshally come behind me when I was talking to the greengrocer's young man and pulled my false hair off!"

"I didn't, ma!" bellowed the little boy. "I only said, 'Cook, does your hair come off like ma's?' and I took hold of it and it did."

Molly Morris rushed at her small son, seized him by the hand, and dragged him from the club smoking-room before he could make any further revelations.

Mrs Johnson, the cook, remained for a moment, glared around, tossed her head contemptuously, and exclaimed, "Humph, you're pretty well set to work, ain't you, and I suppose you call yourselves ladies. My old grandmother smoked a clay pipe, and where I come from it was thought she lowered the family by doing it. But you're ladies, and this ain't a apple-stall at the

corner of a street, it's a club! Good afternoon!"

Mrs Jack Gillingham had sat through the scene like a wax model of the mother of two at Madame Tussaud's. She had not uttered a word, but the twins had carried on an animated conversation in their own language.

"I think, ma'am," said the nurse, "as this atmosphere isn't particularly good for them. They look like choking. It's the tobacco smoke—they ain't used to it."

The maternal instinct triumphed. Mrs Jack Gillingham rose defiantly and bore her offspring from the room. The nurse with the little girl followed her.

As Mrs Gillingham went through the hall staring straight in front of her, but carrying her babies carefully, a voice whispered in her ear, "Don't be ashamed. You are a young English mother tending her own little ones. That is a far nobler occupation than smoking cigarettes and drinking brandy and soda."

Mrs Gillingham looked round and saw

two pretty girls standing in the hall smiling at her.

One of them carried a neatly-folded umbrella. She touched Mrs "Jack" with it gently, and instantly the young mother's features relaxed into a smile. She stooped and kissed her now sleeping babies tenderly, and went out into the sunshine crooning an old-world lullaby.

. . . . . .

The very much made-up middle-aged Countess, whose name Mrs Ehrenstein had been unable to pronounce, was an English lady of good family, married to a Polish Count of ancient lineage and unblemished escutcheon, but latterly of limited means. The Count in his young days preferred the gaieties of Europe to the disturbed atmosphere of his native land, and had for the first few years after his marriage with the young English lady who fell in love with him at Monte Carlo and married him in Nice sufficient means to make life exceedingly pleasant.

But bad investments and extravagance

had told their tale, and now that the Count and Countess were no longer young they found their means becoming every day more straitened.

But the Countess was not going to resign her luxurious style of living without a struggle. She had sufficient good reputation to keep her position in Society, and she was too well known ever to be suspected of being an adventuress.

She had always been a good card-player. Her husband had made her one. When bridge became a fashionable craze the Countess saw her opportunity. She had her bridge parties at home, and she played bridge out. She played bridge at her club, and being an amiable woman of the world she found no difficulty in persuading the foolish women, who lost more money than they could afford to pay, to confide in her.

The Countess, in pretended sympathy, would tell her anxious acquaintances where they could borrow the money to pay their debts. She recommended them to an

obliging money-lender who made a speciality of this sort of business, and she took her commission. Encouraged by her success in this direction, and discovering that many of her fair friends were speculative, she found a starting-price bookmaker and arranged to do business for him with her large circle of female acquaintances. It soon became known that the Countess could "get money on," and so it came about that in the course of time the Countess was actually "making a book" in a fashionable ladies' club.

The Countess was in the card-room. A bridge party had just been formed and the players were seated round the table. A number of ladies had gathered to watch the play, for the bridge parties were always interesting, especially when, as sometimes happened, a fair player lost her temper as well as her money.

"No trumps!" exclaimed the Countess as she looked at her hand, and at that moment the door of the card-room opened and a gentleman of pronounced Hebrew

type entered and sat down by the Countess at the card-table.

"Good afternoon, Countess," he said. "You wrote me for a cheque, so I thought I'd call in here and settle up."

"Go away!" shrieked the Countess.

The man stared. "What for?" he said. "Business is business. Let's settle up. Here's a cheque for £150. That's your commission on the loans to Lady Simpkins, to Mrs Frampton, and to Mrs Hawker-Watkins."

"What!" exclaimed the three ladies, who were in the room; "you are paid to get us to borrow money?"

"You horrid creature!" cried Lady Simpkins; "you are only a money-lender's tout after all!"

Before the Countess had recovered herself sufficiently to reply, a horsey-looking man, rather loudly dressed and smoking a big cigar, made his appearance and sat down on the other side of her.

"Afternoon, Countess!" he said. "I've come to give you the tip. The police have

summoned me for taking ready money—they've seized my books, and I've had to give your name as my partner. We've got to appear at Bow Street to-morrow morning."

The unhappy Countess, overcome by this fresh disaster, burst into tears. When she lifted her face the streaks of sorrow had played sad havoc with her complexion.

The secretary of the club had entered. "Countess," she said, "after these revelations I must ask you to leave the club at once."

The Countess tottered towards the door. The money-lender and the bookmaker rushed gallantly forward, and each of them offered her an arm, which in her dazed condition she accepted.

Supported by the bookmaker and the money-lender the Countess passed through the hall of the club and out into the street.

"What a scandal!" exclaimed the ladies. "I hope nothing will get into the papers."

"No," said the secretary, "we don't want

'A LADIES' CLUB,
STARTLING REVELATIONS,'

on the contents bills to-morrow."

"Ladies' clubs are excellent institutions," said a gentle voice, "but they should not be places where women smoke and bet and get introduced to money-lenders."

Everybody turned. But there was nobody to be seen where the voice came from, but two pretty girls, one of whom was carrying a neatly-folded umbrella.

. . . . . .

"I think we did a good afternoon's work at the Ladies' Club," said Sunbeam, as they drove back to Bloomsbury in a hansom

"Yes," replied Daydream, "and to-morrow we dine with the Ehrensteins at the Carlton. I wonder whether we shall find a sphere of usefulness for philanthropic fairies there!"

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE CARLTON

THE Palm Room of the fashionable West-End restaurant was a dream of flowers and soft lights and fair women when Daydream and Sunbeam, looking radiantly lovely in the latest creations of a great man-milliner of world-wide fame, entered it, and settling themselves in a quiet corner surveyed the scene while they awaited the arrival of the Ehrensteins.

They had not worried about their frocks. They had driven to the magnificent *atelier* of an artist in female attire late that afternoon and ordered them.

" We want them at once," said Sunbeam, as the chief of the department, assisted by a bevy of smiling satellites, drifted forward to receive their commands.

The chief of the department turned pale.

" But surely," he said, " it is a mistake.

It is not to be imagined that the mesdames would find here the ready-made ? "

Sunbeam smiled. " Oh, no ; but the dresses have to be ready for us this afternoon."

At that moment two assistants advanced carrying two lovely creations.

" Ah, they are here," said Sunbeam.

Before the astonished chief could apologise for the mistake he had made in imagining that the young ladies were new clients of the house, Daydream and Sunbeam were in the frocks and were surveying themselves approvingly in the mirrors.

" They are perfect ! " said Daydream. " If you will give us the account we will pay now."

Again the chief of the department went pale and the young lady assistants trembled.

The suggestion of cash before delivery was so unheard of that for a moment none of the staff could frame a reply.

When Daydream picked up her little gold bag, which she had placed on a chair, laying

her neat little umbrella on the top of it, and, taking out a packet of bank-notes, held them towards the head lady assistant, all the other assistants stared at the crisp little packet as though they had never seen a bank-note in their lives.

"Madam will send a cheque," gasped the chief of the department. "We do not—that is—er—we are not accustomed to take money without that we consult the head of the firm, who is in Paris. I dare not—er—"

The chief of the department had visions that if he took cash in this way somebody would presently be coming with an account in gold and the odd money in silver and coppers, and that was a thing too dreadful to contemplate.

"But it is not money that my sister is offering you?" said Sunbeam. "It is paper—a cheque is paper, too—and this is superior paper, you know; the quality is much finer than the paper cheques are made of."

The chief of the department still hesitated

"I should rather a cheque," he said. "Our bankers would think it so strange if we paid in cash."

"What is the amount we owe you?" said Daydream. "I hope it is not beneath the dignity of your house to tell us that."

The chief of the department looked at the head lady assistant, who had a sudden inspiration, and said that the frocks were seventy-five guineas each.

"Thank you," said Daydream. "I thought that was the amount; you will find this cheque drawn for £157, 10s. If you will kindly send the frocks home at once we shall be obliged."

The chief of the department took a deep breath and involuntarily rubbed his eyes.

The young lady was offering him not bank-notes, but a cheque.

The head lady assistant took it with a trembling hand and gave it to the second lady assistant, who handed it to the third, who took it with a little giggle and walked out of the room with it.

The fairies were in their outdoor attire in

a moment; in fact, they were dressed and half-way down the stairs before the head lady assistant had recovered herself sufficiently to instruct her assistants to take the seventy-five guinea "dreams" off the young ladies who paid before delivery.

"Who are they?" the assistants exclaimed in chorus as the fairies departed. "They are not Americans—they must be Colonials."

"We never have the clients of the kind before," said the chief of the department. "I feel my health go bad—I am unfit for business—I must go home."

The lady assistants were very sympathetic, for the chief of the department was a handsome Frenchman, and had a long moustache with curly ends, and dark-brown eyes that would have been like a poem by Tennyson if the owner of them had been English.

When they had sympathised with the chief, who received their condolences in a gold-and-white Louis XIV. chair, someone

suddenly remembered that the frocks were to be sent home at once.

The second lady assistant rang for a lower-grade young lady to remove the frocks and pack them for delivery.

When the lower-grade young lady came in and received her orders she looked a little astonished.

"But they have gone already," she said. "Mlle. le Roy followed the young ladies with them in a hansom."

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Mr Ehrenstein had been prepared by his wife to find the Misses Smith pretty, but when he beheld the two lovely girls dressed, as he said, "like duchesses in a picture-book," he was astonished. "If they are Colonials I'll eat my hat," he murmured to his wife.

A hat is not a fitting *hors d'œuvre* to a Carlton dinner, and Mrs Ehrenstein whispered, "Don't be vulgar, Joe, dear. Remember where you are," and Joe instantly assumed the nearest approach to Society manners he was capable of.

But his admiration of his wife's *protegees* was fatherly and frank, and when they were seated at the table he had reserved by telephone he was unable to conceal his satisfaction.

For the Ehrensteins' guests were the evident admiration of everybody who could see them. "Who are those exquisite girls?" said the famous foreign diplomatist who was dining with a Cabinet Minister.

The Cabinet Minister shook his head. "I don't know—I'll ask."

He sent for the manager, and the manager came, but could give no information. "I never saw them before, sir," he said, "but they are dining with Mr and Mrs Ehrenstein."

"Ah!—American friends of theirs, I suppose?" said the Cabinet Minister. "What lovely girls they grow on the other side! I wish I had gone there when I was younger."

The Cabinet Minister was on the wrong side of fifty and a bachelor. The great diplomatist was a bachelor too, but he was

only forty. He telegraphed that evening to his Government to ask to be transferred from London to Washington.

At about nine o'clock there was the sound of considerable disturbance in the street. The noise was so great that it reached the ears of the company in the restaurant.

The Cabinet Minister inquired of a waiter what it was, and was informed that a procession of the unemployed was parading the West, and that it had stopped outside the Carlton and the leader was making speeches about the luxury of the rich.

The Cabinet Minister frowned. "The police ought not to allow a night procession," he said. "It is illegal in the daytime even."

The manager, who had been out, returned. He looked annoyed, but hastened to the Cabinet Minister to reassure him.

"It is nothing," he said, "but it ought not to have occurred. It was not a procession. It seems the men came by different routes in small parties and met here. The police are clearing them away."

Joe Ehrenstein, having asked what was happening, informed the young ladies.

"Poor chaps!" he said. "Of course, we can't help being rich any more than they can help being poor. I can understand what they feel when they see a place like this lighted up and know what it means —lots of 'em have starving wives and children at home."

"Poor men!" said Sunbeam; "why do not you rich people let them come in and have a good dinner? They want it more than you do."

Joe Ehrenstein shrugged his shoulders.

"It would be a lovely idea," he said; "but I don't think the management would care for it."

"Oh, I wish they would come in," said Daydream, waving her fan.

And then a most extraordinary thing occurred. A procession of ill-clad, gaunt, hungry-looking men walked through the doors of the Carlton two abreast and nobody attempted to stop them.

The attendants in the Palm Room stood

aside. The men took off their hats and, still marching, began to sing, "We've got no work to do."

The beautifully-dressed women seated at the dinner-tables rose nervously—some of them screamed. Their cavaliers rose too, but did not scream. They formed up in close rank at the entrance to the restaurant.

Their faces were very grave. They hoped that the starving men intended no violence. They were prepared to contribute if a collection was the object of the intrusion. But if there was to be trouble, then they would protect the trembling fair as it becomes brave men to do.

Joe Ehrenstein had involuntarily seized a champagne bottle. Mrs Ehrenstein hurriedly removed her diamonds and tied them up in her serviette.

"Don't be nervous," said Sunbeam. "These poor fellows will do nobody any harm."

Then she rose and, in a sweet, clear voice, said,—

"Ladies and gentlemen."

Immediately every eye was turned in her direction.

"I think the best thing we can do," she said, as soon as she had secured the guests' attention, "is to give up our places to these poor fellows and wait on them."

There was a moment's hesitation; then there was a murmur of approval.

Daydream in the meantime had risen and gone to the manager, who, with great presence of mind, had given the signal which summoned his entire staff to fire-drill.

The entrance to the restaurant was guarded by a dozen hotel porters, each armed with a hose ready for action.

The manager had commenced a speech to the unemployed.

"Gentlemen," he said, "if you will retire I will start a subscription for you among the guests. If you remain I must warn you that you will find that this establishment is conducted on strictly temperance principles. Our supply of cold water is at your service."

Daydream, pushing the staff gently aside, approached the manager and touched him on the shoulder with her fan.

"You have a kindly nature," she said. "Let these poor men pass. Your guests demand the pleasure of their company."

The manager bowed. He could not resist the sympathetic appeal of the beautiful eyes that were gazing into his.

"It is a grand idea," he said. "If my clients wish it. They are the masters. I also will help. My kitchen is at the service of the company and these unfortunate sons of labour."

The unemployed, who had halted at a signal from Daydream, gave three hearty cheers. Then they filed into the restaurant in the most orderly manner possible and took their seats at the vacated tables.

"The *menus* are in French," said Sunbeam, "and you will not care for any of the items. Good old-fashioned English fare will suit you best."

Instantly a procession of waiters appeared bearing joints of roast beef and dishes of

greens and potatoes. Others brought in great trays filled with tankards of beer.

Then the guests whose dinners had been so strangely interrupted took up their places near the various tables and waited on the men.

It was a beautiful sight to see exquisitely-dressed women sparkling with diamonds, and handsome men whose names were household words in Society and the City, acting as waiters and waitresses on the hungry unemployed.

The scene so affected Joe Ehrenstein that he shed tears and called for a gross of picture postcards. He wrote a cheque for one pound on each card, and went round the room and laid one by the plate of each of the new guests.

When the men had all been served Sunbeam stepped to the centre.

"Don't you think," she said, "that they would like to have their wives and children with them?"

"Yes, yes," cried all the ladies with one voice. "Let us send for them."

"They are here," said Sunbeam. "Look—the management has filled the Palm Room with tables to accommodate them."

It was true. The Palm Room was prepared for a feast. Long tables were laid lengthways over the entire space, and presently there entered a company the like of which the great hotel had never seen before.

The wives and children of the unemployed trooped in. They were quickly seated, and the waiters, after having rapidly decorated the tables with pretty flowers, proceeded to serve an old English dinner.

"Ladies," said Sunbeam, "you will remain and wait on the men. Gentlemen, I think you would like to attend on the women and children."

If the sight had been affecting before, it was even more so now. The gilded youth and the golden middle-age of Society and the City put their hearts into the task of waiting on the women and children. Never had the proudest dames in the land more devoted squires.

After the men and their wives and families had had as much as they could possibly eat, Sunbeam suggested a smoking concert for their entertainment.

The idea was received with acclamation.

"It's a rippin' idea," said a young marquis, "but it will be rather a big order to get artistes at such a short notice."

"Oh, I daresay we can get over that," responded Daydream, smiling. "I know a great many, and I can just telephone to them to come along at once."

"Ah, I see," said the marquis. "I suppose you are in the profession?"

"Yes," replied Daydream, "I suppose I am."

"I don't remember seeing you at any of the theatres. What are you in—musical comedy?"

"No; I suppose you would call it fairy extravaganza."

The young marquis looked a little bewildered. Then an idea dawned upon him. "Ah, I think I know what you mean," he

said; "Gilbert—and Barrie—and that sort of thing. But, I say—by Jove! look—there's a neat little stage arranged at the end of the room."

The unemployed and their wives had watched the sudden appearance of that pretty little stage with less astonishment than the Smart Set. The unemployed imagined that in a land of luxury a transformation scene of that kind was quite the usual thing. The Smart Set were aware that nothing so expeditious in the way of theatre-building had been accomplished even before there were any County Council regulations.

For there at one end of the Palm Room was a little theatre so daintily fitted and arranged that it would not have been out of place in a Royal or Imperial palace.

"I suppose," said the Cabinet Minister, who throughout the proceedings had maintained a dignified official reserve, "this has been done by one of those marvellous millionaire American contractors who stay here?"

"Possibly," replied the manager. "They do very remarkable things."

When Daydream left him to go to the telephone, the young marquis turned to Sunbeam.

"If you like," he said, "my wife will go on first and fill in till the artistes come."

"I'm sure the company would be delighted; but what can the marchioness do?" replied the fairy.

"You don't know my wife! I thought you were in the profession. I'm the Marquis of Kilburn—my wife was 'Daisy Bell,' of the Gaiety—she used to dance, you know. She'll go on and dance now, if you like. Daisy!"

The marchioness, a charming girl of five-and-twenty, who was talking with some of the poor women and petting the children, came to her husband.

"Daisy, you won't mind dancing for these poor people, will you?"

"Not a bit," replied the marchioness, and in a moment she was on the stage, and the horny-handed sons of toil and their

patient helpmates were cheering vociferously.

For the Marchioness of Kilburn was Daisy Bell once more and was dancing with all the grace and abandon that won her the homage of the West in her old Gaiety days.

And then followed one of the most remarkable entertainments that had ever been given at a smoking concert.

When Mme. Melba and Signor Caruso appeared and sang the great duet from *Romeo and Juliet*, the unemployed were held spellbound by the glorious voices, but the regular *clientele* of the Carlton were astounded at the presence of the stars. They asked each other in awe-stricken tones how on earth the two young ladies, who seemed to have taken the management of the concert in hand, had been able to get Melba and Caruso at a moment's notice, seeing that it was not the opera season in London.

Then came the stars of the stage, the palaces of variety, and the music-halls, and as the unemployed sat and listened and

smoked choice Havana cigars, and their wives and children helped themselves to bon-bons from the dainty boxes which were handed round at intervals, the scene was one which appealed strongly to the better nature of the wealthy and aristocratic people who were privileged to assist at it.

The Cabinet Minister was so deeply affected by it that he went straight to the House, which was sitting, and interviewed his colleagues as to the advisability of instantly introducing a Bill which would bring prosperity once more to the working classes of the United Kingdom.

The Smart Set left the concert about eleven o'clock, having most of them to go on to other functions. They all agreed, as they talked their strange adventure over, that they had spent a far happier evening watching those poor people enjoying themselves than they would have done had they merely gratified their own palates, criticised each other's frocks, and admired or envied each other's jewellery.

Mrs Ehrenstein was so delighted that she

determined to organise smoking concerts for the poor and the unemployed in every district of the Metropolis, and "Joe," heartily approving the suggestion, promised that whatever the scheme might cost she should have a cheque for it.

About a quarter-past eleven the manager, who had been rendering the most loyal assistance to the young ladies directing the entertainment, began to look anxious.

Daydream asked him what was the matter.

"The theatres are just over," he said, "and there will be a lot of people coming here to supper. I don't know how they will like having to pass through a smoking concert and the unemployed."

"Oh, that will be all right," said Daydream. "The concert is over."

She waved her fan. The manager looked round and convulsively clasped his brow with his right hand.

"*Sapristi!*" he exclaimed. "I must have fallen asleep in the Palm Room and have dreamt it all. I hope I didn't snore!"

For the Palm Room was almost empty; only a few late diners were sitting over their coffee at the little tables. There was no stage. There were no unemployed. The supper parties were arriving and coming through to the restaurant in quite the ordinary manner.

The unemployed were not a little bewildered when they found themselves at home. The only thing that made them feel sure that it couldn't have been a dream was that every one of the genuine workers who had fallen on evil times had a sovereign in his pocket, and more than one of them had the stump of a Havana cigar in his mouth.

. . . . . .

"I think our smoking concert was a great success, dear," said Daydream, as the sisters took off their seventy-five-guinea frocks and put on their dressing-gowns in the cosy little flat at Bloomsbury, and settled themselves down for the little chat by the fireside which they dearly loved.

"Yes," said Sunbeam; "and I do not

think there have been many happier evenings spent at the Carlton since it was opened. There was a sphere of usefulness for fairies there after all."

"It seems to me," said Daydream, "that there is a good deal more work in London than two fairies can ever hope to get through. We really want a fairy bureau with a permanent staff, a place that a poor mortal in need of fairy help could telephone to at any hour of the night or day."

"That is a great idea," replied Sunbeam, "but how can we get back to Fairyland to impart the idea to the Queen? We are banished."

"There is only one way," said Daydream. "We must go back disguised as mortals, and perhaps when the Queen hears our idea she will forgive us, and the law against fairies visiting the earth will be repealed."

"Let us go at once," said Sunbeam, who was always a little impatient.

CHAPTER IX

IN PARLIAMENT

BUT before the Fairies quitted Mortal Land they had one more adventure.

They were just about to start on their journey to the Fairy Realms from which they had been exiles so long, when Daydream, taking a last look round the flat in which they had been so happy, because it was there they had arranged their little plans for the happiness of others, caught sight of the morning paper which had been thrust under the door by the newsvendor's boy, Mrs Twitterby not being up to take it in.

"I'll just glance through it, Sunbeam dear," said Daydream. "It is the last paper we shall see. That is one thing I am sure we shall miss in Fairyland."

Daydream sat down in an arm-chair and opened the paper, and read little bits aloud

to her sister, who was standing by the window taking a last look at London.

Presently Daydream left off reading aloud, and read quietly to herself.

"Oh, dear, how interesting!" she exclaimed, suddenly looking up from the printed page. "Don't you think we could manage to stay here a little longer—say another twenty-four hours?"

"Of course, if you wish it particularly, but I am very anxious to get back at once and try to induce our Queen to start a Fairy Bureau in this wonderful World's heart that mortals call London. What is it you have seen in the paper that makes you want to put off our journey?"

"Oh, it's quite a wonderful thing. There is a new Parliament, it seems, and there are quite a number of Labour Members—real working men—in the House for the first time."

"Real working men in the Council of the Nation!" said Sunbeam.

"Yes, dear—miners and carpenters, and railway shunters, and engineers, and

bricklayers, and operatives, and blacksmiths."

"That's a splendid idea. Of course they know what the working classes really want, and it's a very big class. We have seen that."

"Yes, and this evening several of these working men members of Parliament are going to speak on a Bill that has been introduced by a Labour Member. I should so like to go and hear them."

"It would be very interesting," said Sunbeam.

"Indeed, it would. Shall we stay just one more day, dear, and go to the House of Commons this evening?"

"Certainly. I am sure it will be most instructive. We may get some useful hints for our Fairy Bureau."

. . . . . .

The policeman on duty at the House of Commons would have been very much astonished had anyone told him that he had allowed two young ladies to pass

through the doors he was supposed to guard so vigilantly.

But his Inspector could not have blamed him, for the young ladies were fairies, and had made themselves invisible directly they passed into the precincts of Parliament.

Sunbeam and Daydream, invisible to mortals, passed the eagle eyes of the officials, and seated themselves first of all in the Strangers' Gallery.

But not finding that very comfortable, they flew out of it and alighted just in front of the Speaker's chair.

"This is ever so much better," said Daydream, forgetting to make her voice inaudible.

The debate had just begun, and the interruption startled the House, for it came apparently from the Speaker's chair.

The Speaker, startled by the sound, stared in front of him, and the officials prepared for immediate action.

But there was not the slightest sign of guilt on the face of anyone near the spot from which the sound had proceeded, and

after a minute's pause, during which Honourable Members looked at each other in amazement, the Member who had been addressing the House resumed his speech.

"How thoughtless of you, Daydream," whispered Sunbeam, inaudibly; "the sound of your feminine voice quite bewildered everybody. It is evident that the rules are very strict here. That of course is quite right. It would not do for everybody to talk at once in an assembly where matters of such grave import as the welfare of the people are discussed. But I wonder what that massive-looking instrument on the table is? If it is the Speaker's wand he must have some difficulty in waving it."

"It looks very heavy," said Daydream. She advanced to the table and picked up the Speaker's mace—of course, being a fairy she did so easily.

Instantly the Speaker leapt up in his chair, the officials darted forward, and the House stared aghast at the phenomenon.

"Who touched the mace?" thundered the Speaker, glancing up at the galleries.

When the Speaker was a little boy he had one day, for mischief, lowered a long piece of black thread from an upper window, and his brother had tied it to the knocker of the front door.

Then the two boys, from an upper window, had pulled the thread, and the knocker had knocked. A footman came out, saw no one, and went in again. They kept on knocking, and every time the footman opened the door there was no one there, and the poor man began to think that his brain had given way, or that some supernatural agency was at work on the knocker.

The remembrance of his boyish escapade flashed across the Speaker's brain as he saw the mace rise up on end without visible agency being at work. At first he imagined somebody in the gallery was doing it with an invisible line.

But a moment's reflection convinced him that such a thing was impossible, and unable to think of any proper form of expression for the outrage, he said "Order! Order!" and looked away from the mace, hoping

that he had been the victim of an illusion, and making up his mind to have his eyesight tested by his private oculist at the earliest opportunity.

Daydream had not calculated on the effect of her female fairy curiosity. She was very sorry because the Speaker seemed so distressed, but she and her sister could not help a little inaudible giggle.

"We must be careful," said Sunbeam; "they are very highly-strung, nervous people here. We must keep quite still or we shall cause a panic and confuse the working-men Members who want to make nice speeches."

The Member who was speaking and had been twice interrupted was so confused by what he had seen that he forgot his speech altogether. He said "Hem" and "Ah," and then he sat down very red in the face and coughed violently and pretended he had something in his throat.

As it turned out that he was a very rich man and was speaking against the Workers' Bill, the Fairies were not at all sorry.

Daydream and Sunbeam, fearing that

they might thoughtlessly disturb the grave functionary in the Speaker's chair again, went and sat down—of course, still invisible—among a number of elegantly-dressed and prosperous-looking Members. From where they sat they had an excellent view of the Labour Members, who were quite plainly attired. Some of them looked what they were, superior artisans. The Fairies noticed the earnest, business-like eagerness in the faces of the workmen M.P.'s, and their fairy hearts went out in sympathy at once to these stalwart and determined sons of toil who had worked themselves up from the mine, the forge, the bench and the loom to political power in the Council Chamber of the Nation.

When one of them, a middle-aged man with stooping shoulders, a lined face and a pair of piercing grey eyes, rose to speak there was a hush of expectancy.

Daydream had read about this man in the newspaper that morning and she whispered to her sister what she knew about him.

His life had been a bitter struggle from childhood. Left fatherless and motherless before he was sixteen, he had earned his own living from that age, and had many a time, when things were bad, slept under a railway arch or among the sacks and crates of the Boro' Market.

But he had managed, in spite of his privations, to educate himself, and when he was earning about twenty-two shillings a week he married a poor girl whose life had been almost as hard as his. She earned a little money and they made a home, and though they never knew what it was to have more than thirty shillings a week between them, they lived happily and worked on bravely, and fed and clothed the little ones that came to make the frugal husband and wife more frugal still.

He riveted the attention of the House directly he began to speak. His eloquence was rugged, but his words were well chosen and straight to the point. In the course of his speech he gave an illustration of Labour's needs from the story of his own struggles.

The bulk of the Members listened sympathetically, but there was a fashionably-dressed, good-looking man of about five-and-thirty, sitting just by the Fairies, whose face all through the Labour Member's speech had been a study in supercilious disdain. When the working man told the pathetic incident from his own life the supercilious gentleman exclaimed, loud enough to be heard by those near him, "Rot!"

No one noticed the expression, which was intended only for his neighbours, men of his own way of thinking, but it made the Fairies very indignant.

"Can't we punish him for that, Sunbeam?" whispered Daydream.

"Yes—but we must find out something about him. Let us go up into the Reporters' Gallery—they will know all about him there."

The Fairies transported themselves to the Reporters' Gallery at once. There was a grey-haired old gentleman in front writing away for dear life.

Sunbeam, who had taken a vacant seat just behind him, leant over and said, in a gruff voice like a man's,—

"Who is that good-looking man with a black moustache and a gold eyeglass and a flower in his buttonhole?"

"Marmaduke Meinstein," growled the old reporter, wondering why the man behind him didn't know.

"What is he?"

"Company Promoter or something of that sort. Rolling in money. Sailed a bit near the wind to make it, they say. But for goodness' sake shut up. I'm not a Guide to the new House of Commons."

Sunbeam had learnt all that she wanted to know.

"Come along, Daydream," she said. "Let us go back again and give Mr Marmaduke Meinstein his lesson."

The Fairies returned to the seat they had occupied on the Opposition benches and listened in silence to the speech of the Labour Member, who was advocating with heart eloquence the cause of his class.

The debate had reached its crucial point. That night the vote was to be taken which would decide its fate.

There were doubts as to the result. There were many dissentients among the Liberals, and the Opposition were against it to a man. If it passed it would mean a triumph for Labour, and though it was generally admitted that there was a good deal of justice in the demand of the working-classes which the Bill attempted to meet, there were many on both sides of the House who thought the measure went too far. The friendly dissentients called it Socialistic —the unfriendly dissentients called it Revolutionary.

The Labour Member brought his speech to a close amid the hearty applause of his party and sympathetic cheers from the majority of the House.

The sympathy was rather for the man than for the measure.

Up in the Ladies' Gallery there was the sound of a little sob. But there was no sorrow in it. It was the heart cry of the

workman's wife, who had come to hear him make his first speech, and would have liked to have rushed down to him and hugged him there and then.

Of course, such a thing would have shaken the foundations of Parliament. For a wife to kiss her husband in the House of Commons would be the beginning of anarchy.

Another Member rose to catch the Speaker's eye, caught it, and proceeded to attack the measure. He was sarcastic, and being a licensed wit in the Assembly, his lively sallies were received with cheers and laughter.

Mr Marmaduke Meinstein's laughter rang out above everyone else's. He was thoroughly enjoying the polished impertinences of the Honourable Member in possession of the House, when a most extraordinary thing happened to him.

Somebody whispered in his ear, "Marmaduke Meinstein, get up and go out."

It sounded like a female voice, and the

wealthy Company Promoter turned pale.

He was not subject to delusions. There was no insanity in his family. He didn't believe in ghosts or spirits or supernatural agencies. And yet, sitting on the benches of the House of Commons, he distinctly heard a female voice say to him, "Marmaduke Meinstein, get up and go out."

Mr Meinstein rose. He tried not to, but he felt a superior force compelling him.

"I'm not well," he thought. "I'll go to the smoking-room and have some old brandy."

He went out of the Council Chamber, and was making his way to the Members' smoking-room, when he distinctly saw two young ladies standing in front of him.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, "where am I?"

The young ladies vouchsafed no reply, but one of them waved a neatly-folded umbrella and exclaimed,—

"Marmaduke Meinstein, follow me."

Before the words had died away in the solemn silence of the corridor the young

ladies had vanished, but Mr Meinstein felt himself drawn irresistibly forward.

He tried to stop himself, but in spite of the most frantic efforts he had to go on.

He passed out of the House of Commons without stopping to get his overcoat. It was a bitterly cold night, and the Company Promoter, who had given one hundred guineas for a fur-lined overcoat, shivered as the keen breeze struck him. The stars glittered like steel in the frosty sky.

"I shall get my death," groaned Mr Meinstein, as his teeth chattered, and an icy current ran through his veins.

But a feminine voice cried, "Forward, Marmaduke Meinstein, M.P.," and he thought he saw an umbrella waving a little way ahead of him.

"I am suffering from some obscure form of mental disease," he groaned. "It isn't claustrophobia or aphasia, but it has the symptoms of both. I had to get out of the House of Commons and I can't think of the right words to address the person who is waving that absurd umbrella in front of

me. I shall write a letter to the editor of the *Daily Mail* on the subject directly I get home. Ugh! how bitterly cold it is."

His teeth chattered so loudly that two street urchins who were selling evening papers followed him curiously.

They thought he was an advertisement for a music-hall turn or something of that sort, and was playing the bones with his teeth.

Presently he turned down a slum in Westminster and found himself in a rookery of miserable, dilapidated houses.

It was a wretched place. The ramshackle houses were only two storeys high, and in front of him rose a massive black brick wall several feet in height.

At the top of the narrow entry—for that was what it was—the M.P. stopped and looked back.

In the clear starlit night he saw the towers of Parliament.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Can such miserable dens exist under the very eaves of the Palace of the People's Will!"

He didn't like the alley. He didn't like the look of the people who were hanging about.

But to his surprise they took no notice of him.

He put his hands to his coat to turn up the collar, for he was blue with cold, and then to his astonishment he found that his attire had completely changed.

He was dressed as a poor working-man—one who had been out of employment for some time. His coat was terribly thin. He had no waistcoat on. He thrust his frozen hands into his trousers pocket to warm them and found a pawn-ticket.

He took it out and read it.

"One waistcoat, 4d." He had pawned his waistcoat. He wondered why.

It was an absurd thing for any man in his senses to do on such a night as this.

But though he wondered he went on, and presently, half-way down the alley, he stopped.

"That is your home," said the voice in his ears. "You are a working-man out of

work. You have a wife and two children, and your rent is five-and-sixpence a week. Step in."

Mr Marmaduke Meinstein entered the miserable-looking dwelling. A woman sitting by the fireless grate lifted her haggard face as he entered, and her sunken eyes gazed at him despairingly.

"The children are crying for bread," she wailed. "What shall we do? What shall we do?"

The prosperous Company Promoter had, for a moment, lost his identity. He was a workless workman with a starving wife and children.

"Oh," he groaned, "it is terrible! We are starving in a land of plenty. I am *willing* to work, but I can get no work to do."

"Rot!" replied a female voice. "That is what you called it in the House of Commons to-night."

Mr Marmaduke Meinstein instantly remembered himself. His identity had returned. He had witnessed just such a

scene as the Labour Member pleading for the unfortunates of his class had described.

But he was terrified. Why had he come here? Who had forced him to have this heart-rending personal experience? He had never believed in the Black Art, but this was Magic—Magic beyond all possibility of doubt.

And the voice came from an invisible person.

"I—I don't know who you are," he stammered, while the cold perspiration broke out upon his brow. "But, for Pity's sake, let me go back to the House. The debate will not be closed yet. Let me get up in my place and speak. Let me plead the cause of the poor and suffering—those who have been more honest, and yet less fortunate than I have been, in the struggle for life."

"You shall have your wish," replied the invisible voice.

Mr Marmaduke Meinstein was dimly conscious of two charming young ladies who suddenly "materialised" in the

wretched room, and he thought that one waved a neatly-folded umbrella just like a fairy waves a wand.

And the next moment he found himself back in the Commons, sitting on the Opposition side of the House, and intensely interested in the debate on a measure which was to improve the conditions under which the working-classes live.

Watching his opportunity Mr Meinstein rose and caught the Speaker's eye.

Everybody stared at him. He was not a talking Member. No one remembered ever to have seen him attempt to join in a debate before. But he was known to be rabidly Conservative.

It was therefore with the greatest astonishment that the House listened to him, as, his voice quivering with emotion, he spoke in favour of the Bill. Rarely had such genuine pathos embellished the eloquence of a fashionably-dressed M.P.

As Mr Meinstein painted a picture of the tragedies of poverty the occupants of the Ladies' Gallery sobbed audibly. The

occupants of the Front Ministerial Bench used their handkerchiefs so loudly that the Speaker called out "Order!"

But his voice was broken as he did so, and an observant journalist in the Press Gallery, while taking the speech down in shorthand, inserted in brackets "(Here the Speaker was observed to wipe away a tear)."

It was the closing of the debate. When Mr Marmaduke Meinstein concluded his speech the House rang with thunderous cheers. The Labour Members rushed across the House in a body, and seizing him in their brawny arms lifted him up and bore him shoulder high into the Division Lobby.

The Bill was carried by a triumphant majority, and while the Labour Members were still congratulating and thanking Mr Marmaduke Meinstein, the Fairies Sunbeam and Daydream stole softly away, and wished themselves back in their flat in Bloomsbury.

. . . . . .

The next morning when Mrs Twitterby woke up she was in a charming little cottage

in the country. She was surprised to find that she had an open letter in her hand, as she didn't remember receiving it.

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